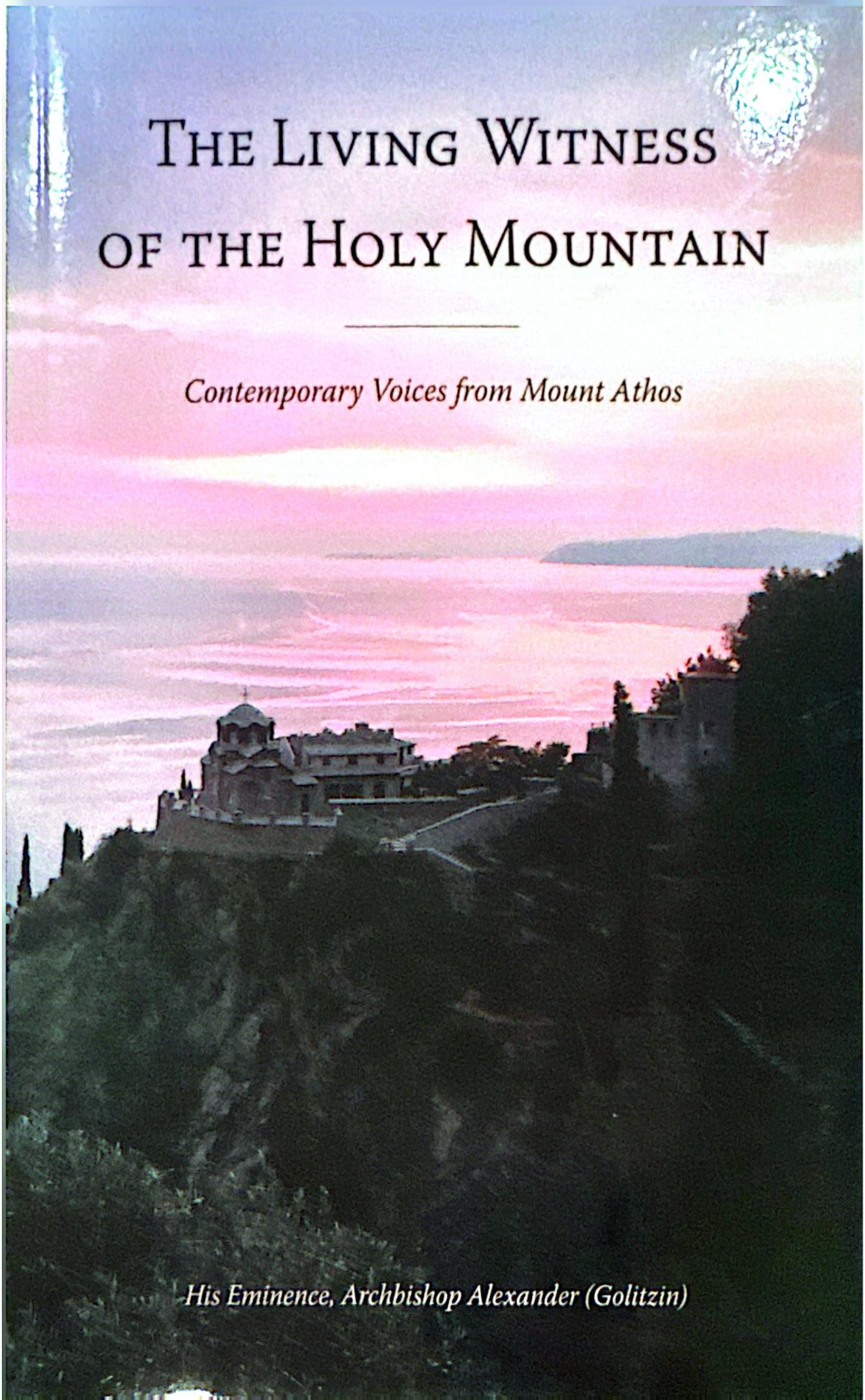
The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain

Contemporary Voices from Mount Athos



His Eminence, Archbishop Alexander (Golitzin)

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MMXVIII

The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain:
Contemporary Voices from Mount Athos
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Neither could I have done without the two months on fellowship spent at Dumbarton Oaks this past summer (June–August, 1991). The splendid facilities and distraction-free atmosphere provided by the staff and directors of the institute made possible this work, as well as—I hope—others to follow.

To the anonymous though not unknown monk who wrote on the reception of Saint Herman's relic in Greece, who was also that unnamed

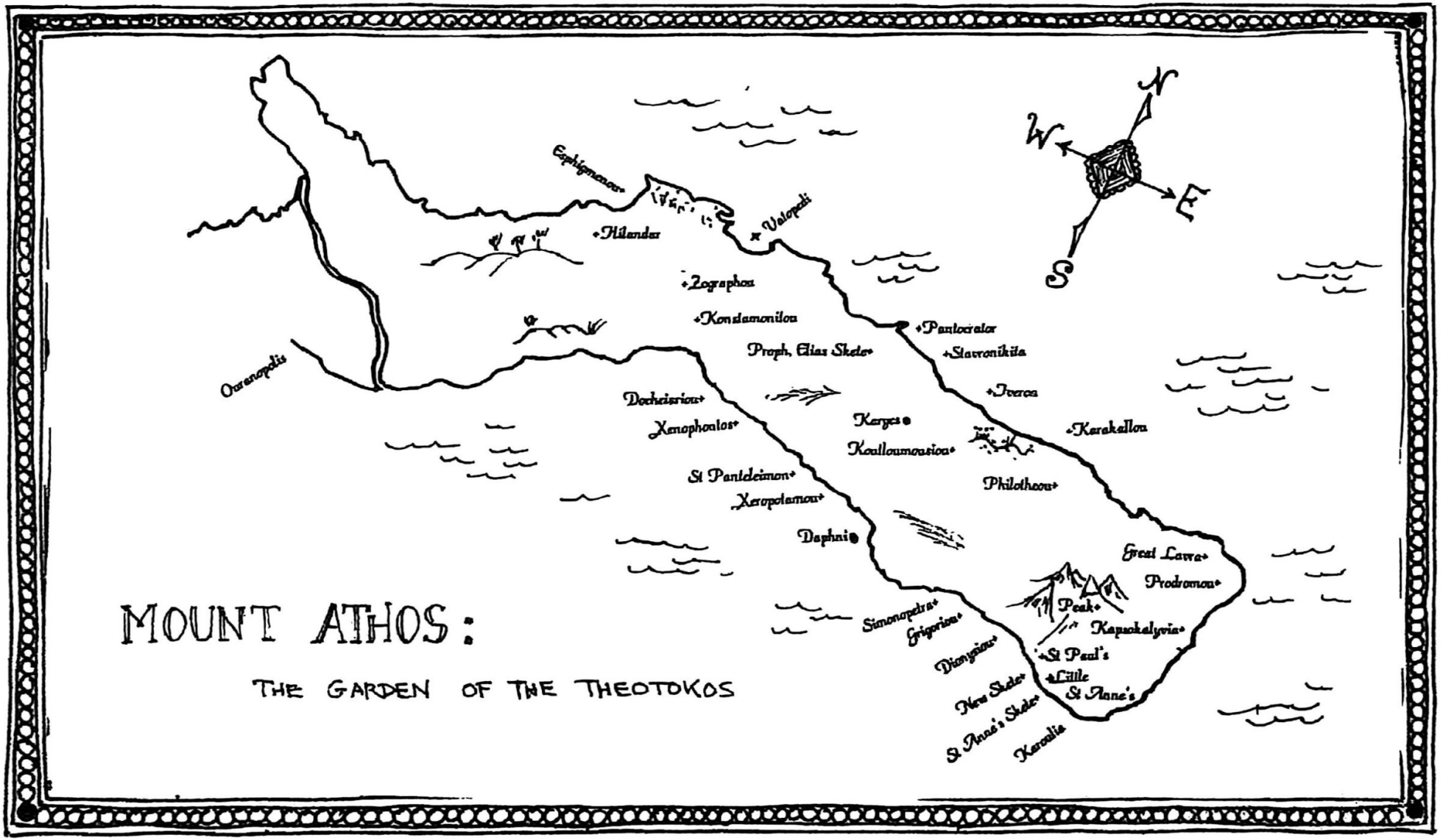
disciple of the abbot assigned to bring the saint from Alaska to Ormylia, and who encouraged me to include this section in the completed book, I state my enduring gratitude and fraternal love. I must also thank Father Macarius of Simonos Petras, who contributed more to this book and its contents than the title credits—and his modesty—permit me to reveal. To my Abbot and father, Aemilianos, I offer once again my love and gratitude for a debt I shall never be able to repay and shall ever rejoice in acknowledging.

Thanks are due, too, to the Seminary and Monastery dedicated to one Saint Tikhon (of Zadonsk) and founded by another (of Moscow) for the publication of these texts. His Eminence, Archbishop Herman of Philadelphia and Father Raphael of the Monastery were both generous of their time and suggestions, as was Father Juvenaly, who also typeset the book. I am most grateful to Father Tikhon for his illustrations, and to Kathryn Mahaffey who in consultation with Fr. David Mahaffey compiled the indices. It is surely fitting that the longest continuously existing Orthodox monastery in the New World should be involved in publishing this witness to contemporary monasticism coming from the single most important center of Orthodox monastic life in the Old. God grant that this common effort may encourage that love for the monastic way that has always characterized the Orthodox people.

For the kind assistance of my mother, Carol Golitzin, and of my old and dear friend, Father Basil Rhodes, for patience in proofreading in the former's case, and of intercepting and responding to late night and early morning telephone calls in quest of odd references in the latter's, I owe many thanks.

Other texts included in this volume are: "Martyrdom and Monasticism," originally given in Greek and published in pamphlet form in that language by Simonos Petras, and "The Transfiguration," a pamphlet put out by the same monastery in French. The text for the "Hagioretic Tome" is taken from J.P. Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, volume 150, columns 1225–1231. For the English of all texts herein, however, particularly for any inadequacy or infelicity of expression, I must take full credit.

Scriptural citations and numbering normally follow the Revised Standard Version. In some cases these were supplied by the original author of the respective text; elsewhere I have added them as a convenience to the reader. Where, however, the Septuagint Greek is not in accord with the English rendering of the Hebrew, I have translated the former and noted it in parenthesis with the initials, LXX, following the chapter and verse. I should also take this occasion to apologize for my not altogether consistent manner of noting scriptural citations, and patristic ones as well for that matter. Both the press of time, and the fact that most of the notes for the talks and sermons below were not provided by me, has led in some cases to a less thorough and complete system of notation than I would otherwise have preferred.


MOUNT ATHOS:
THE GARDEN OF THE THEOTOKOS
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Esphigmenou
Vatopedi
Hilandar
Zographou
Konstamonitou
Pantocrator
Stavronikita
Proph. Elias Skete
Iveron
Karakallou
Dochiariou
Xenophontos
Kerzes
Koutloumousiou
Philotheou
St Panteleimon
Xeropotamou
Daphni
Great Lavra
Prodromou
Peak
Kapsokalyvia
Simonopetra
Grigoriou
Dionysiou
St Paul's
Little
St Anne's
New Skete
St Anne's Skete
Karoulia
Ouranopolis

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Preface

THE MATERIALS assembled in this book are of many kinds. They include stories, sayings, sermons, lectures, autobiography, narrative, and one historical document of considerable importance and theological complexity. They have three things in common: all have been written by and about Athonite monks; all, with one partial exception, are appearing in English for the first time;* and all, with two exceptions, are the work of one of the twenty "ruling monasteries" of Mount Athos, Simonos Petras. As this was the community where I was myself tonsured monk some six years ago, it is with particular joy that I offer this collection of works by my fathers and brothers to my fellow Orthodox in North America.

While many readers are already familiar with the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church, and while many—though perhaps fewer—know and appreciate the importance to the Church of monasticism in general and Mount Athos in particular, there will certainly be others who know little of the former and nothing of the latter. There will, as surely, be still more whose impressions of Athos and monasticism are marked, to put it gently, by the assumptions of the prevailing culture of America and Western Europe, according to which anything so old and so lacking in apparent social utility must be dismissed as either irrelevant or, more likely, as so outmoded in our day and age as to be positively harmful. In a world of Silicon Valleys who needs a Holy Mountain?

This volume will, we hope, serve as a reply to some of these difficulties. At the risk of certain repetitiveness, we offer the reader a few introductory remarks on the history of Athos and the place of monasticism in the Orthodox Church with the hope of providing a context for the

* Since these words were written, an English translation of the *Tomos of Mount Athos* (chap. 5 in the present work) was published in vol. 4 of the *Philokalia*.

texts that comprise the main body of this book. As many, however, as are eager to meet and converse with the originals, the real Athonites, are warmly invited to proceed directly to the texts and dispense with the preliminaries.

Athos, Past and Present

> They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
>
> —*Isaiah 11:9*

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

THE PROPHET Isaiah is speaking of the end times, the last days, and the mountain he has in mind is certainly Zion, the mount of the Temple in David's city. As Abbot Aemilianos points out below,[1] the history of "the Israel of God"[2] is full of holy mountains. Whether the Ararat of Noah's Ark, the Sinai and Horeb of Moses, Nebo where Moses looks over the promised land he is not permitted to enter,[3] whether Carmel where Elijah bests the priest of Ba'al,[4] or Tabor of the Transfiguration, Calvary or the Mount of Olives, whether for a moment as in Elijah's contest or for generations to the present day as in Jerusalem itself, each such high place becomes a sign or type, a place of encounter, an anticipation of and communion with God's presence and kingdom: "For you have not come to what may be touched... But you have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."[5]

In the centuries following the writing of the New Testament, mountains have continued to punctuate the pilgrimage of God's people. With the rise in particular of monasticism in the fourth century, we find Christian ascetics fleeing the cities and villages of the ancient world to make their home in the mountains and deserts of Egypt and Syria. Saint Antony the Great, "father of monks," removes to a mountain on the edge of the Red Sea.[6] He is followed by disciples, until his lonely hermitage becomes a monastery (still existing) and center of pilgrimage. The pattern is repeated down the centuries in every Christian country.[7]

Yet to say merely pilgrimage center is perhaps a little weak. Over the long course of the Church's history such places have acted as beacons attracting the imagination and hope of millions. They have provided a continuous witness of holy men and women to the reality and presence of the Christian hope. In dark times—and the Orthodox Church has known some very grim times, indeed, these past thousand years—the monks have provided light and hope, have been sources of missionaries, preachers, exemplars, and models of the "new man" in Christ. They have lent strength and, more often than not, have directly inspired the Church's renewal and recovery of the Tradition.[8]

Of all the holy mountains, other than Jerusalem itself, that have lit the path of Orthodox Christians over the past millennium, there is one which is unquestionably preeminent, the Holy Mountain *par excellence.* This is Mount Athos, the world's one and only "monastic republic."[9] While other monastic centers in the Eastern Church have longer histories, no one of them approaches the importance and continuing influence of Athos. If there is such a thing as a real heart, a spiritual center that can be given an identifiable "local habitation and a name" in so manifestly decentralized a phenomenon as the Orthodox Church, then that heart is certainly Athos.

As Father Macarius points out below,[10] this does not mean that Athos is a kind of Vatican, the sort of center for administration and teaching authority that the papacy claims to be. Athos claims no magisterium, to use the Roman Catholic term. The Athonites are not bishops, nor do they arrogate to themselves any of the rights and duties of bishops. They are under the episcopal supervision of a bishop, the Patriarch of Constantinople, though he lives several hundred miles away and on the other side of an unfriendly border (a situation, we must admit, that the monks find not altogether unsatisfactory).[11] They welcome bishops warmly, as guests, and, like any modern parish, send them as warmly (perhaps a little more warmly) on their way once the visit is over. They assert no right either to govern the Church or to define doctrine.[12] Theirs is not, then, an authority *de jure,* but it is one that is nonetheless very real *de facto.* Tested by generations of sanctity, their

charismatic and prophetic (and we shall return below to those terms) office has proven so important in the Church that it is difficult to imagine any fundamental changes taking root in the Orthodox world that do not somehow obtain the seal of Athonite approval or, at the least, of its tolerance.[13] How and why this authority has come to be, its roots in the history of Athos and of Eastern Christian monasticism, will be our subject in what follows, beginning with:

A CAPSULE HISTORY OF ATHOS

The Place

Mount Athos, the republic of the monks, is a peninsula in northeastern Greece.[1] It is about one hundred miles—a three hour drive—east and south of Thessalonica. The road, itself only just under thirty years old, stops at the village of Ouranoupolis on the border of the monastic lands. At this point one is obliged to travel by boat to the main port of the Mountain, Daphni, and thence (if one is a visitor) to the capital, Karyes, at the center of the peninsula. Easternmost of the three prongs comprising part of the province of Chalcidice, the Athonite peninsula extends some thirty-five miles, the last twenty of which are monastic property, south and westward into the Aegean sea. It varies from one mile at its narrowest to about five in width. The land has the form of a pitched roof, with its height and slope increasing as one travels from north to south. Gently rolling and only a few hundred feet above sea level in the north, it steepens and grows progressively craggier moving south until the ridge attains a height of about three thousand feet before culminating in the breathtakingly sudden swoop up to the summit of the marble peak (over sixty-six hundred feet) from which the entire peninsula takes its name. Vegetation clothes the land thickly, its composition differing as one ascends from sea-level: Mediterranean chaparral with sycamore and laurel along the watercourses and olive tree terraces and orchards on the lower slopes, broadleaf forest of oak and chestnut from about fifteen hundred feet, pines at over twenty-five hundred, and a final thousand feet of sheer, white stone to a summit streaked with snow over half the year. The natural beauty is overwhelming. Athos is, physically, a

kind of Shangri-la, a land that has suffered none of the depredations of goat and hardscrabble farming which have so scarred the Greek mainland. Its coast, particularly the western side, rivals—when it does not surpass—the Riviera of France and Italy. It is an earthly paradise.

Early and Byzantine History

So extraordinary a geographical phenomenon as this mountain rising vertically from the sea could not avoid notice in the ancient world. Aeschylus, for example, mentions it in the opening chorus of the *Agamemnon*. Yet it appears to have remained long untenanted in the early centuries of the Christian era. Monastic legend ascribes the special status of Athos to a visit paid it by the Mother of God,[2] and stories put out by several of the twenty monasteries have populated the peninsula with monks from as early as the reign of Constantine (d. A.D. 339), or even the pagan emperor, Caracalla (given, respectively, as the founders of the monasteries of Constamonitou and Caracallou); however, we have no historical evidence of any monastic presence prior to the ninth century. Hermits, starting with Saint Peter the Athonite, begin to appear in the 800s. They accept a loose kind of organization from Saint Euthymius in the same century, and have their "lavra"[3] recognized by a *chrysobul* (imperial decree) of the emperor Leo VI (886–912). Karyes, the present-day "capital" of the Mountain, appears to have existed from this time as the center of monastic organization and residence of the protos, or first in honor among the hermits.

Athos's history as the great center of Orthodox monasticism and as an independent or quasi-independent state within a state, properly begins with the figure of Saint Athanasius,[4] founder of the oldest and in many ways still the most important of the monasteries on the Mountain, the Great Lavra (*Megisti Lavra*). A friend of the then emperor, Nicephorus Phocas (963–968), he secured a *chrysobul* from the latter in 963 which established Athos as uniquely for monks and placed it under direct imperial protection. For three hundred and fifty years the monks would continue free of any outside intervention, including from the Church hierarchy. In 1312, supervision of the Mountain was finally

ceded by the emperors to the Ecumenical Patriarch, where it remains today. Continual exposure to monkish quarrels "about matters of prestige and endowments... as well as endless lawsuits about the boundaries of the monastic lands... the date of the foundation of monasteries and their place in the order of precedence... "[5] had finally exhausted the Imperial patience. Monks, alas! were and are often no less prone to the fever of litigation than other mortals.[6]

The eleventh and twelfth centuries were periods of enormous growth. In addition to those foundations that have since disappeared, monasteries were established that continue in place today. Vatopedi, Agiou Pavlou, and Xeropotamou were founded by Greek speakers. Other houses were founded by peoples within the Byzantine cultural sphere, for example Iveron (Georgian) in the tenth century, Xylourgou (Russian) in 1142, and Hilandar (Serbian) in 1198, and even from the West: the Latin Benedictine monastery of Amalfitans existed from the first half of the eleventh century well into the thirteenth.[7] Athos thus made an early claim to its status as the international center of Orthodox monasticism.[8]

This initial flourishing was brought to a sudden and bloody halt by the century of chaos and looting following the Crusaders' taking and sacking of Constantinople in 1204. The ensuing dismemberment of the Byzantine Empire into a constellation of feudal domains meant unending grief for monasteries as well as for the rest of the empire's population. The monks were prey to the exactions of Frankish lords and prelates who were every bit as greedy for loot as the pirates—another, and lasting, problem—who had begun to infest the waters of the eastern Mediterranean. The Athonites, in 1213, were even reduced to the embarrassing extremity of appealing for protection to Pope Innocent III,[9] the sanctioner of the unhappy IVth Crusade (though not of its looting). Their appeal was readily granted, but to little avail. The Pope's writ ran weak in "Romania" (the Crusaders' name for the conquered territories). He was far away, while the monasteries, wealthy and undefended, were ready to hand.

More troubles deriving from the split between Catholic West and Orthodox East, and from the aftermath of the Crusades, were to befall the Holy Mountain in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The emperor Michael VIII (1259–1282) attempted a politically motivated union with the papacy in 1274. This led to the installation of a unionist patriarch, John Bekkos, and to pressure on the Athonite community to conform. Present Athonite tradition holds that this emperor and patriarch were responsible for the deliberate murder of dozens of monks and the persecution of the whole community. A cenotaph at the Bulgarian monastery of Zographou commemorates the fathers burned alive there in this period, and legends tell of a cave of "the wicked dead" where the bodies of monks who permitted a Latin liturgy to be sung at Great Lavra lie bloated and unnaturally incorrupt—rather like the vampires of Bram Stoker's novel—to the present day. It seems likelier nowadays that "these legends of murder and burning grew out of the Catalan raids on Athos in 1307 or 1308."[10] The murderous visitation of these men of war, a mercenary company mistakenly hired by the emperor Andronicus II in 1302, together with continuing pirate incursions, the monks' staunch defense of Orthodoxy, resentment of Latin aggression, and resistance to imperial attempts at Church union in the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, seem to have all combined to forge the present stories. That the monks did suffer, and terribly, is no exaggeration, however. No one of the monasteries escaped some devastation.[11]

The apogee of Athonite prosperity and Athos's most significant contribution to Orthodox theology arrived in the wake of these disasters, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The phenomenon known as "hesychasm" was ostensibly a debate over the nature of the experience of certain contemplative solitaries—"hesychast" being a word in use from the fourth century to mean anchorite or hermit.[12] These men claimed that, as a result of their assiduous practice of the "Jesus prayer,"[13] they had seen the uncreated light, the divine glory, which had shone around Christ at His transfiguration on Mount Tabor. While both the practice of the "Jesus prayer" and the teaching concerning the Christian's participation in the glory of God were long established in the Church's

tradition,[14] they were called into question by an Italo-Greek monk, Barlaam of Calabria, in the 1330s. The defense of the traditional view by Gregory Palamas (d. 1358, canonized ten years later) led to a debate that raged throughout the 1340s, and that moved quickly to focus on Saint Gregory's distinction between God's essence, unknowable and unobtainable, and His actions or "energies," that is, God as He is truly given to us and known in the Holy Spirit through Christ. It is this teaching, defined as the official doctrine of the Orthodox Church in three separate councils held at Constantinople, that we find in the "Hagioretic Tome" translated below,[15] and that underlies virtually every one of the essays collected in this volume. It is also, we should note, the final Byzantine expression of the understanding of salvation in Christ that is implicit in the New Testament and first enunciated clearly by Saint Irenaeus of Lyons around A.D. 180: "The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ... did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself,"[16] and a hundred thirty years later by Saint Athanasius of Alexandria: "For He was made man that we might be made God."[17]

Hesychasm was more than an exchange between theologians, more even than the articulation of a vital truth. It involved imperial politics, international and ecumenical relations, art, and the very direction of the Orthodox Church in a world and era where the approaching end of the ancient empire and the Christians' eventual servitude under the Ottoman Turks were becoming more and more clear to all concerned. It was a "reawakening of Byzantine spirituality" which had "effects far beyond the shrinking boundaries of the... Empire... It lit up the whole Orthodox world."[18] Remarkable leaders, including several Patriarchs of Constantinople, rose out of the monastic and especially Athonite milieu of hesychasm and led the way toward the forging of "a new solidarity of... religious and ideological nature... tying together the Eastern Christian *ecumene*,"[19] and influencing events as far off and significant as the formation of modern Russia.[20] In certain respects it would be no exaggeration to say that hesychasm—and thus Mount Athos—saved the Orthodox Church, providing her with a new dynamism and unity

on the very verge of Byzantium's collapse and the centuries-long captivity of its people under Muslim rule. The quickening power of the Holy Mountain would also be felt again, in more recent times and in even more apparently hopeless circumstances. This brings us to:

Turkish Rule (1430–1912)

> Under our law they have remained as free, even freer, than under the Byzantine emperors... They will regret us, Monsieur.
>
> —*Turkish Governor of Athos to a French journalist on the eve of Athos's liberation by Greece in 1912.*[21]

The Turkish official was, on the whole, quite correct. Aside from some rough times following the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s, when Turkish troops were quartered on the Mountain and the monastic population sank to its lowest levels ever, the Sultans "always respected" the rights of the holy men of Athos.[22] This did not, however, prevent them from happily drawing on the community's resources via the same heavy tributes and taxes which they also levied on the Christian population generally, and on its leaders in particular.[23] This constant drain, with its consequent poverty and indebtedness, contributed significantly to a general decline of monastic life from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Throughout the Orthodox world learning and culture were at a low ebb. The Turks did not encourage it, and Muscovy (Russia) to the north had not yet developed its own intellectual resources. One can say with some fairness that this period in the life of the Eastern Church was comparable to what Western Europe suffered in the centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire. These were the "Dark Ages" of the Orthodox world.

If one were to single out a specific indicator of this gloom of intellect and spirit as reflected in the life of Athos, it would have to be the growth of the *idiorhythmic* pattern of life in the great monasteries. This word, meaning literally private or individual way of life, denotes the

shift in the monasteries away from the common ownership of property and from obedience to a single abbot (i.e., the life of the *koinovion*, or coenobitic monastery). Committees of *proistamenoi* (senior monks) replace the once all-powerful abbot; the brethren are allowed to own property, and the community breaks down from a single family into a congeries of as many groups as there are seniors—each of the latter normally having his own disciple or disciples. The key innovation was that over property. Once admitted, the authority of the abbot was fatally undermined. The new system began appearing in the last century of Byzantium and had taken over all the monasteries of Athos by the end of the 1600s. Although idiorhythmic houses could usually count a number of genuine ascetics among their members, there was still an inevitable loss of spiritual "tone." Perhaps the one good thing to emerge from this expression of decadence was the reappearance of the "scetes," loose collections of monks on the pattern of ancient Scete in Egypt and the Palestinian "lavras" of the fifth and eighth centuries. The first scete appears at the close of the sixteenth century,[24] and it is from this and its fellows, and from the hermits, that the leading figures of Athos will normally come—up to and including our own century.

Athos still did produce remarkable men, saints and luminaries. Saint Maximus the Greek (d. 1550), for example, led an astonishing life that took him from the Ottoman Empire to Renaissance Italy and Savanarola, back to Athos, and finally to the Moscow of Ivan the Terrible.[25] Saint Akakius Kavsokalyvites, a remarkable ascetic and hermit noted for his charisms, flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Saint Cosmas of Aitolia, another Athonite, preached the Gospel in northern Greece, where he is credited with bringing the population back to Christianity from the brink of apostasy, and died a martyr in the eighteenth century.[26] The theme of apostates to Islam finding succour and counsel on Athos, and then returning to the "world" to embrace martyrdom through a public renunciation of the new faith and declaration of loyalty to Christ, is frequent in the lives of the "New Martyrs" of the Turkish period.[27]

Two figures, however, stand out as particularly significant. Their appearance marks a turning-point whose effects are still felt today. One was Greek, and the other Slav. The first, younger of the two, took the monastic name of Nicodemus on Mount Athos in 1775,[28] and for the remaining thirty-four years of his life devoted himself to literary work, translations into contemporary Greek of both Eastern[29] and Western[30] spiritual writings, compilations of canon law, commentaries on the liturgical cycle of feasts and on Scripture, a *Guide to Confessors*, a *Spiritual Handbook*, collections of saints' lives, and various tracts—including several advocating regular and frequent communion. His was an enormous output of lasting value. Yet far and away the most significant and lastingly influential of his works was the anthology he compiled, together with Saint Macarius of Corinth, of writings on prayer. It comprised selections from ancient writers of the fourth through the fourteenth century, and was published in Venice in 1782 under the title of the *Philokalia*. Amand de Mendieta, who rather downplays Saint Nicodemus's importance, calls this "among the most read works of the Orthodox Church."[31] This, while true, is quite inadequate. It would rather be no exaggeration to say that this book (or library of books—it is five, thick volumes) is the most important single work to be published in the Orthodox world in the past two hundred years. Virtually every one of the men featured in our volume owes a great debt to the *Philokalia*, as well as to Saint Nicodemus's other works. The appearance of this collection brought the hesychast tradition once more to the fore and thus, with that reappearance, fostered a renewal of monastic life on Athos.[32] Following the difficulties of the 1820s, the monasteries began to move away from the pattern of idiorhythmic life and back to the traditional rule of life in common under the direction of an abbot. The process has taken over two hundred years, but today not one idiorhythmic house remains on Athos. All have reverted to the traditional form, a complete reversal of the situation Saint Nicodemus found on his arrival at the Mountain, and one that is very much the result of his influence.

Our book concludes with an Athonite abbot's praise of an American saint.[33] We are thus led to the observation that this process of renewal

did not stop at the borders of Athos, or even of Greece and the Ottoman Empire. Like the hesychast movement to which it looked, the revival in which Saint Nicodemus played so central a role spread to the furthest reaches of the Orthodox world, including the very shores of North America. Here we arrive at the second of our figures, a Ukrainian monk, Paissy Velichkovsky (d. 1784), who arrived at Athos in search of a teaching on prayer he could not find in a Russian Church scarred by the reforms of Peter the Great.[34] Saint Paissy (he was canonized in 1988) produced a translation of the *Philokalia* into Church Slavonic, offering a slightly different selection of texts than Nicodemus's. This work, published in Saint Petersburg in 1782, was destined to have the same impact on Orthodox Slavs as Nicodemus's on the Greeks. Due to the presence of Rumanian speakers in the monasteries he established in Moldavia, Saint Paissy also oversaw the translation of the anthology into Rumanian where, again, it contributed to a renewal whose effects are still visible in that country's lively monasticism.[35] It is, finally, through Saint Paissy's efforts that the Athonite revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or rather its spirit, has become known in the West—primarily through its effects on the Russian Church. Figures such as the fictional elder Zossima in Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* and the very real elders of Optina monastery who served as his models,[36] Saint Seraphim of Sarov,[37] and the anonymous author of *The Way of the Pilgrim*,[38] have all become relatively widely known in Western Europe and America. Indeed, the role of the Pilgrim in J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* marks hesychasm's appearance—so far unique—in mainstream American literature. Yet, as Father Aemilianos observes below,[39] there is nothing uniquely Russian about these remarkable individuals. Even Saint Seraphim's famous conversation with Motovilov[40] is only (but what an "only"!) an example of the sort of encounter with the Spirit of Christ that lay behind Athonite hesychasm's witness in the 1300s.[41] While there may well be a certain difference in "flavoring" between these Russian and Greek saints, such would be exceedingly difficult to define and, moreover, would take nothing away from the fact that both

are of the same "substance"—that is, appear to us from within the same Tradition to which Saints Nicodemus and Paissy were both witnesses.

The Russian embrace of Athonite renewal that began in the late eighteenth century leads us to two last observations concerning this period of Athos's history. The first touches on the story of Orthodoxy in America while the second, regrettably, reveals the human and fallible side of Athonite life which has its wider echoes in the Orthodox Church today and, again, here in the New World. To begin with the former, it was one of Saint Paissy's disciples, Nazary, who in the late 1700s was appointed abbot of the monastery at Valaam north of Saint Petersburg. There he put into practice what he had learned from his Elder. In turn, and not long after his appointment, a young and devout Russian monk came to receive his monastic formation from the famous abbot and, not many years later, was dispatched in 1793 with six other monks of the monastery to assist the Russian Orthodox mission in the latest addition to the empire, Alaska. The little monk's life was not, outwardly, one of spectacular achievement. He spent practically the whole of his remaining forty-three years (d. 1837) on a little island a couple of hours by boat from Kodiak, and it was a very austere life: rigorously ascetical, apparently isolated, the life of a lonely hermit. Yet, like Saint Antony fifteen hundred years before, or the Athonite hesychasts in their caves in the fifteenth century, Saint Herman (canonized 1970) left an indelible mark on the new American Church.[42] Moreover, as Father Aemilianos explains in the two sermons below,[43] this mark the Saint left behind him, the memory of his holiness which affected both the Christian and non-Christian population of the entire region, and which was the indispensable foundation for the later work of the great missionary and saint, Innocent (Veniaminov), was also unmistakably Athonite in its character: "Saint Herman was not just an Alaskan saint, but a native of Mount Athos. He is a fruit of the Holy Mountain. His fathers were Athonites."[44]

In a very real way the American Church's gift of a portion of this saint's relics to a monastery associated with Athos, described in the concluding section of this book, is a true homecoming. When we consider

that it is the relic of a saint who was born in Russia, lived in the New World, and who summed up in his person a tradition emanating from Athos and Greece, but which also drew ultimately on the Egypt of Saint Antony and the Palestine of the Prophets and Gospels, then we would not be unjustified in reading into it as well a sign of the unity of the Orthodox Church, of her ecumenical spirit and unbroken continuity.

Sadly, a lively sense of that continuity and unity is not always to the fore in the Church's life, at least as the latter is manifested in this world. Witness the sad state of Orthodoxy in America, splintered into a welter of overlapping "jurisdictions"—Greek, Russian, Serbian, Arabic, and so on—in a sorry display of ethnic exclusivity.[45] Athos had its own equivalent, if not formally, that is, in terms of overlapping bishops, then at least in spirit. Amand de Mendieta sees "the outstanding feature of Athos during the nineteenth century" as "the struggle between the Greek and Slav races, and the ever-increasing influx of Russian monks. This battle—it cannot be given any other name—began about 1840 and continued till the Revolution of 1917."[46] While we would rather see the hesychastic revival begun by Saint Nicodemus as the truly "outstanding feature" of nineteenth-century Athos,[47] there is no denying that the "population explosion" of Russian monks in the latter half of the century—motivated, to be sure, by genuine piety as well as the less savory ambitions of the imperial government—awakened passions and left scars behind which are still felt today. Some of the scars are physical, chiefly the supremely ugly and inflated buildings erected in a spirit of Russian triumphalism, but also including the unhappily sentimental religious art decorating the buildings' interiors—though, in fairness, it should be noted that the latter was hardly a uniquely Russian invention. Bad iconography had infected the whole Orthodox world. There were also spiritual scars. These consist in the lingering resentment still perceptible in the Greek Athonite community. The latter is a theme picked up on and reported by one visitor after another over the past hundred years. Athelstan Riley notes it in the 1880s,[48] Robert Byron in the 1920s,[49] Dawkins in the thirties,[50] Sydney Loch in the fifties,[51] Norwich and Sitwell in the sixties,[52] and the Serbian monk, Mitrophan, in the

eighties.[53] Dawkins called it rightly a threat to the Mountain as representative of universal Orthodoxy,[54] and Sherrard sees it as still threatening "to subvert the whole Orthodox character of the Holy Mountain."[55] One can only hope that this plague, particularly given the unquestionable dominance of the Greek presence and the forthcoming need for Athos's witness by the newly-freed Churches of the former Soviet bloc, will quickly abate. Then, too, there were and are other threats to Athos's thousand-year existence. Until recently, these appeared almost certain to put a swift end to the monastic republic.

The Greek State (1912–Present): Decline and Renewal

> The country is richer, the monasteries poorer... The monks who not long ago were revered are now more often ridiculed as a bunch of foolish old perverts... The fundamental, unanswerable fact is that Mount Athos has become an anachronism, and one which modern Greece is no longer able to indulge.[56]

These words, printed in 1966, appeared at the time to be sober truth. The same writers also wondered aloud "what may happen when, probably within the lifetime of most readers, the thousand-year history of the Holy Mountain comes to an end," and then added: "What we have not done is to make any proposals as to how the disaster may be averted. There are none to make. The disease is incurable. There is no hope."[57]

That this grim prophecy would not come true, would indeed fail with, as we shall see, an almost pinpoint "accuracy," was not at all obvious twenty-five years ago. The series of catastrophes afflicting the Orthodox world in the twentieth century—beginning with World War I and followed in succession by the Bolshevik Revolution, the Greek loss of Asia Minor, Stalin's Terror, the German invasions of World War II and their killings, the disappearance of all Eastern Europe behind Communist rule, and capped by the Greek Civil War of the late forties—all had their inevitable effect. The loss of novices from Russia and the Balkans meant the drying up of the monasteries previously populated by Slavic

and Rumanian monks. When Greece itself finally began attaining to a certain prosperity in the sixties, and more so in the seventies and eighties, it was at the price of a touristic invasion and the resulting corrosive exposure of young Greeks to the loosened mores of Western European visitors (who themselves were passing through the dissolution of the sixties—and, anyway, people seldom behave with as many constraints on their behavior abroad as they are obliged to do at home). The unfortunate association in the popular mind between the Junta that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974 and the Church authorities, also contributed to a negative view of the traditional faith. By the late sixties and early seventies the situation on Athos appeared truly desperate. Numbers were at their lowest ebb since the 1820s and the aging monks seemed, as Norwich and Sitwell noted above, to be the last of their kind.

Today the situation of the Holy Mountain is stunningly different. The past twenty years have seen an astonishing and utterly unlooked-for reversal. Bishop Kallistos[58] and Professor Mantzarides,[59] writing in the early eighties, report an increase of some one to two hundred monks from 1971, the first such increase since before World War I. More though than simply the unexpected growth in monastic population, it is "the actual change in the life of Athos, both visibly and invisibly [which] has been far more dramatic than those figures suggest on their own. The average age of the monks has noticeably diminished... the quality of the new monks more noteworthy than their quantity. Around 1965 probably no more than twelve to fifteen... were university graduates; now there must be over a hundred."[60] The last figure has also certainly increased since Bishop Kallistos wrote. What happened? More importantly, why did it happen? We shall deal briefly with the "what" and then turn to the "why."

Norwich and Sitwell again: our prophets inadvertently singled out the place where the renewal would begin. Writing of the monastery of Stavronikita, they see doom rapidly approaching: "Its funds and inhabitants have decreased to almost vanishing point. Discounting the tragic condition of the Russian monastery of Saint Panteleimon... this will probably be the first to crumble altogether into ruins and disappear."[61]

This prophecy did come true, briefly. In 1968 the monastery was abandoned—and repopulated a few months later. Led by their young, university-trained abbot, Father Vassileios (Gondakakis), a small group of monks came from outside the Mountain to settle in the deserted establishment.[62] Amand de Mendieta rightly noted the importance of this new development shortly after its occurrence, and he ventured the hope that the Church authorities, Greek government, and the Holy Community of Athos could "work amicably together to solve the present difficulties, to preserve the essentials, and to bring new life to Athos, even though this must involve drastic changes, and will call for energetic and far-seeing leadership. If Athos could be radically reformed, it will be possible that the Holy Mountain can again be a vivid center of monasticism."[63]

Fortunately, neither the Greek government nor the Church authorities ever became much involved, and we shall return momentarily to the questions raised by "drastic changes" and "radical reform." For now, let us note merely that Athos has indeed become once again a "vivid center of monasticism," because Stavronikita proved to be the beginning of a pattern. Five years later Father Ephrem of New Scete, a disciple of the renowned elder, Joseph the Hesychast,[64] brought his own disciples to the practically abandoned monastery of Philotheou. Christmas the same year, 1973, saw Father Aemilianos (Vapheides) lead another community from the Great Meteora in Thessaly to Simonos Petras. In July, 1974, Father George (Kapsanis), former professor of theology at the University of Athens, led still another group from the island of Evvoia to Gregoriou monastery. In 1975 it was a second group of monks from New Scete, led by Father Christodoulos, who settled at Koutloumousiou near Karyes, and, in 1976, Xenophontos was renewed by a group under Father Alexius which, like the Simonopetrites, had also begun at Meteora. Dochiariou, northernmost of the monasteries on the peninsula's west coast, received a group of young monks from outside the Mountain in 1979, and, in the process, became a common life monastery after centuries in the idiorhythmic mode. 1980 marked the renewal of three monasteries. Xeropotamou and Constamonitou were colonized from

Philotheou with the former of the two also changing from idiorhythmic to common life. Dionysiou received a group from within the Mountain under the direction of Father Charalampus, another disciple of the elder Joseph. The same year also saw what was perhaps the definitive signal of the renewal. The Great Lavra of Saint Athanasius became, on its own initiative, a common life house as in the days of its founder. Further changes have gone on in the 1980s. Caracallou received yet a third group from Philotheou while the monasteries of Hilandar, Vatopedi, and, most recently (1988), Iveron have all made the changeover from idiorhythmia to life in common under an abbot. Pantocrator, the last remaining idiorhythmic house, accepted a new group of monks and the status of *koinovion* in early 1992. The cycle is now closed. That particular decadence, begun as we noted in the waning years of Byzantium and virtually universal on Athos by the opening of the eighteenth century, has seen its last day. For this disappearance we have surely to thank primarily the work of Saint Nicodemus and, in particular, his compilation and publication over two hundred years ago of the *Philokalia*.

Here, in this linkage between Athos's return to life and the *Philokalia*, we arrive at the question of "drastic changes" and "radical reform." No such thing has occurred. The renewal is fully one which Bishop Kallistos described as a "traditionalist revival."[65] Nothing could be further from the minds of these young monks than engaging in a sort of Athonite equivalent to the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II—presumably what Amand de Mendieta had in mind. They are anxious instead to learn and live the one tradition that the *Philokalia* (and other works) articulates. Their desire is for the same ancient yet transfiguring spirituality that Father Placide (Deseille) describes below in our opening section, and for which he came to Athos in quest... and found.[66]

To date the re-population has been almost exclusively Greek in nationality, the "almost" owing to the surprising presence of a number of Westerners, Europeans, and Americans, on an Athos now "open to the West in a way that was not the case two decades ago."[67] As yet, no new waves of novices from Eastern Europe and Russia, have arrived. In part, this is due to the regrettably suspicious and nationalist attitude of

the Greek government (and not a few, alas! of the monks), still smarting from the Russian tide of the previous century. It is not unlikely, however, that in view of the recent shaking of the foundations behind the one-time Iron Curtain, we shall see, in the fairly near future, a steadily increasing volume of requests to permit the substantial reinvigoration of the Slavic and Rumanian establishments on Athos. God willing, these requests will eventually meet with approval and the Mountain will once more—and soon—reappear in its proper and ancient light, at once Greek in its majority and language, and ecumenical in composition and influence, a beacon and shaping force for all the Orthodox world—and beyond.

But we have still to address the question why these men, our own contemporaries, have been drawn to a way of life so at odds with "modernity." Bishop Kallistos lists four reasons: the secularization of Greece; the decline of Zoe and other religious organizations; the pressure of tourism in Greece proper; and the presence of outstanding spiritual guides, of elders (*gerontes, startzi.*)[68] Let us complete our pocket history with a few observations about each of these.

Secularism. We noted above the sudden changes in Greek life introduced following the Greek Civil War. The initial effect of these changes, chiefly increased wealth and more exposure to the West, did indeed have a depressing effect on the Church's life, and especially on Athos. To be sure, it is also likely that modern consumerism will continue, as in the West, to lure the majority of the population for the foreseeable future. After all, the "good life" is intensely seductive. Yet the very suddenness of the transition, the virtual invasion of so much that was and remains alien to the traditional culture, was bound to provoke a reaction. We have seen something like this in the West, from "flower children" to "Jesus people," from "new age" to the current return of many "baby boomers"—for reasons both good and not so good—to the religion of their youth. Some years ago we, Americans, were surprised and discomfited by a not dissimilar, though vastly more violent, turning away to traditional religion in Iran. We have also, very recently, been astounded

by the overnight evaporation of the Soviet Empire and the unraveling of the U.S.S.R. Perhaps future research will show that the latter was not as miraculous as it now appears. We did, after all, have some hints that the Bolshevik tyranny was not so natively Russian a phenomenon as we had often been led to believe. Solzhenitsyn, for example, refers to Leninism somewhere as a "dark, unRussian whirlwind."[69] The violent imposition of an alien ideology has now, simply, come to its term. So, too, the young Greeks, at least some of them, turn from alien and vacuous ways to their roots, and those roots include Orthodox monasticism and, thus, Athos.

The Decline of Zoe. The latter, together with *Soter* and other organizations, had played a significant, not to say dominant, role in Greek Church life from just after the turn of the century to 1974, the fall of the Junta with which it and the other groups had been associated.[70] It was, or still is, an organization of theologians, clergy, and laity dedicated to Christianity and its Gospel, but by and large interpreting the latter in ways significantly influenced by Protestant pietism. Sentimentality, emotional feeling, biblical literalism, and moralism were and are its signal features. In a way, though quite involuntarily, *Zoe* and the others are themselves an alien feature in the life of the Orthodox Church.[71] Certain of the current leaders on Athos, among them the abbots Aemilianos, Vassileios, and George, passed through *Zoe* on their way to traditional monasticism—passed through and left it behind, as have nearly all the present generation of young people.

Tourism. Both domestic and foreign tourism has tended in recent years to empty the male monasteries still left on the Greek mainland. We noted above that several of the communities had come to the Holy Mountain from outside its borders. In the case of the two of them from the ancient monasteries of Meteora presently at Simonos Petras and Xenophontos, the move was necessary in order to preserve the fabric of community life. It was either move, or else become museum curators for the literally hundreds of tourists bussed in daily during the high season.

In the case of two of the other communities from outside, those presently at Dochiariou and Gregoriou, the sheer weight of pilgrimages by the pious (and perhaps merely curious) prompted the search for a more isolated locale. Yet, even on Athos Greek pilgrims are proving a problem, especially given the room and board that the monasteries provide all guests.[72] Restraints are in place, and work fairly well, to limit foreign visitors, but there are no limitations yet on access for native Greeks, and pressure from them alone has grown very great.

Outstanding elders. These are certainly the *sine qua non* of the contemporary revival, drawing on a thirst as old as the hunger for the "man of God," and as contemporary as the desire for personal and immediate experience. Young people in Greece, increasingly like anywhere else in the West, are less drawn to institutions than to people in whom they sense something living, vital, and communicable. "What draws them," the Bishop remarks, "is the abba rather than the abbey."[73] Here, too, is the truly miraculous factor in the "Athonite spring." All three of the preceding elements are obviously sociological, perfectly explicable in worldly terms. On the other hand, that, "at a number of independent centers, men have emerged with the distinctive gifts of the *geron*,"[74] is surely the work of the Holy Spirit. Such, at any rate, must be the faith of the Orthodox Christian and just such, precisely, is the age-old pattern of renewal repeated over and over again down the centuries of the Church's life: when in need, God will raise up saints for His people. Monasticism itself, at its origins, was just such a phenomenon. The current crop of charismatic elders is part of a pattern, to be sure, but it is one—so the Orthodox would insist—that has its starting point in the Kingdom of God.

A last observation on the present elders: while several of them do come from outside Athos, a goodly number are "native" Athonites, representatives of a continuity of life and sanctity on Athos itself. There never was a time, we believe, when such gifts were lacking on the Holy Mountain. The regions of Athos from which these current leaders came to their respective monasteries, the scetes and hermitages in

particular of the peninsula's southern tip, had, as we saw above, risen to prominence at the end of the sixteenth century as a kind of response to the breakdown of discipline signaled by the rise of idiorhythmia in the monasteries. Two books recently translated from modern Greek, Archimandrite Cherubim's autobiographical *Recollections of Mount Athos*[75] and Archimandrite Hierotheus's semi-fictionalized *A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain*,[76] testify to this continuity in the hermitages. Writing of this region nearly sixty years ago, Dawkins felt that he had arrived at the heart of Athos: "I cannot resist the feeling that in the cottages and hermitages are the most genuinely devoted of the monks of Athos. Everywhere I found hard work, great simplicity, and austerity of life, and the kindest hospitality. They all live, whether in hermitages or scetes, in the most severe manner. They are all poor, some very poor."[77]

Similarly, over thirty years later, Constantine Cavarnos's most memorable interviews are, on the whole, with the inhabitants of the "deserts" of Athos. Helen Waddell, whose lyric introduction to the fathers of the Egyptian desert is still moving, heard "the rhythms of eternity" in the questions of one of those fourth-century ascetics: "Tell me, I pray thee, how fares the human race?... Whose empire is it that now sways the world?"[78] Cavarnos finds something similar on Athos in the 1950s: "'Why did I come here? you will ask me,' said the hermit, whose name was John. 'For the sake of eternity. Our life here on earth... will inevitably come to an end. When we die, these titles and capacities will mean nothing, absolutely nothing. The only thing that will matter then will be the quality of our soul, whether it is good or bad, whether we have saved it or lost it. Heaven and hell are everlasting.'"[79]

Yet eternity was and is not there, in the "desert," understood as something belonging exclusively to "the sweet by-and-by." Father Joseph the Hesychast tells Cavarnos: "The Jesus prayer gives results. You need not accept this assertion on trust. Your own experience will prove it. Experience proves the prayer of Jesus."[80] For details of that experience in Abba Joseph's life, as well as in the lives of several others, we refer the reader to the "Contemporary Paterikon" below.

Our point here is simply that, while the monasteries may have faded during the time of Athos's decadence,[81] the experience of God in Christ, together with men who have both known it and been capable of communicating it to others, have never been absent from the Mountain. Athos, like virtually no other single place in the Orthodox world, has known that continuous succession of sanctity that Saint Symeon the New Theologian wrote of a thousand years ago: "[The] saints themselves come after the saints who preceded them, and from generation to generation they join their predecessors through the practice of God's commandments. Like them, they are enlightened and receive this grace of God by participation. They become just like a golden chain with each of them a link, bound to all the preceding: saints in faith, love, and good works... one single chain in one God."[82] The current renewal does not then mark the appearance or reappearance of anything that was ever lacking or had departed the Holy Mountain. Anyone who has ever gone camping knows full well how a "dead" fire can blossom into flame with a breath of wind. Just so have the charisms hidden in the scetes and hermitages now awakened in the monasteries, quickened, so we believe, by God's own Breath. Once more they are lighting up and warming the Orthodox world.

Our continual reference to "common life" monasteries, to scetes and hermitages, has perhaps left the reader wondering about the way of life and the patterns of its organization on Athos. We think it may be of some help, therefore, to discuss these matters and to see how it is that the monks pass their daily lives.

THE MONKS OF ATHOS: ORDERING AND DAILY LIFE

Organization

On May 10, 1924, the monastic republic of Mount Athos agreed to a "constitutional charter" (*katastatikos chartes*) with the government of the Greek state.[1] While acknowledging that the Mountain forms part of the latter's territory, the Charter affirms the community's internal sovereignty, traditional from the *chrysobul* of the Emperor Nicephorus

Phocas in A.D. 963. The state is represented by an appointed governor who resides at Karyes, the administrative center of Athos, and is responsible for the maintenance of public order.

The monasteries themselves number twenty, seventeen Greek and one each for Serbs, Bulgarians, and Russians. The Rumanians have their large, "common life scete" dedicated to the Forerunner (Prodromos) at the tip of the peninsula, but it is a dependency of the Great Lavra. The Georgians were centuries ago pushed out of control of the monastery founded and named for them, Iveron, and are not presently represented on the Mountain. All land is divided up among the twenty "ruling monasteries." They are the sole owners of the peninsula and all the other monastic groupings are in the category of renters. The Charter devotes considerable detail to the reciprocal rights and obligations of the twenty with their dependencies, such having been the subject of no little wrangling in the past (and still in the present).

For matters concerning the whole community, the central government of Athos, the "Holy Community," is responsible. It is composed rather like the U.S. Senate. One representative is appointed by each of the monasteries and is obliged to reside at the monastery's house or embassy (*konak*) at Karyes. Day to day matters are handled by the Sacred Council (*Hiera Epistasia*), a sort of executive arm composed of the representatives of the five most senior monasteries. The largely titular presidency of this council, the office of Protos, is rotated among the five with the term of office fixed at one year. Episcopal authority belongs to the Ecumenical Patriarch, who alone is to be commemorated as the ruling bishop of Athos. His authority, however, is quite strictly limited to spiritual matters—that is, heresy, schism, gross scandal, and the like—and he has generally found it politic to intrude on Athos in only the most dire of circumstances.[2] The monks continue to guard their privileges and autonomy with, to put it mildly, very great vigilance.

The Monasteries. Internally, the monasteries are entirely self-governing. While the abbot is elected for life and enjoys complete authority over matters touching on worship and spiritual life, his authority over all

aspects of the monastery's life is not absolute. On questions relating to the future of the monastery, its income, properties, and the like, the abbot is obliged to consult the council of senior monks (*gerontia*), usually about eight to twelve in number and normally appointed for life. He must also work with the two or three stewards (*epitropoi*) who are the council's executive officers and, usually though not always, elected by it. This is the government of a "common life" monastery, or *koinovion*. All property is held in common and distributed to each at need. In most circumstances the arrangement works harmoniously, though of course any human arrangement has the potential for conflict. Normally, the abbot expects and receives unquestioning and immediate obedience. In several of the monasteries today the abbot is also the spiritual father of all the monks. In others, the task of hearing confessions and directing the fathers' internal lives is delegated by the abbot to certain select monks, occasionally from outside the monastery, who are of proven experience and character. By Athonite rule, the abbot is always a priest and carries the additional title of "Archimandrite."

The dependencies of the twenty monasteries fall under the following categories according to the Charter: 1) archetypal or idiorhythmic scetes (eight in number); 2) common-life scetes (only one left of any size, the Rumaniah); 3) huts and hermitages (*kalyvai* and *hesychasteria*); and 4) the cells (*kellia*). To proceed with each in turn:

Idiorhythmic Scetes. These are communities whose original pattern goes back to primordial monastic history. If the *koinovia* look to Saints Pachomius and Basil the Great for their founders, the *scetiotes* look to Saint Macarius the Great, and the Abbas Moses, Arsenius, *et al.*, who figure in the stories and sayings of the *Gerontikon* or *Apophthegmata Pateron* (Sayings of the Fathers). The setting for the latter was the community centered in the fourth century around Scete, an appalling desert about sixty miles south of Alexandria. We find the same form of monastic life in Palestine in the following centuries where the communities are known as *lavras*.[3] Although relatively recent on Athos (1572), this form of monastic life has had a continuous existence, albeit in different parts

of the Orthodox world. Its present-day form is that of a kind of village, several houses of one to five or six monks grouped loosely around a central church and guest quarters. Each house is under the direction of an elder (*geron*) who may or may not have one or more disciples (*hypotaktikoi*). The government is an elected overseer, the prior (*dikaios*), who holds office for a year and looks after the Church and guest house. Daily services are normally observed in each of the houses with the central church (*kyriakon*) coming into use, at least for the whole community, only on Sundays and feast days. Like all the dependencies, the scetiotes must support themselves. They earn their living in a variety of ways: woodcarving, iconography, metal work (as in church plate), and even hymn writing are some of their specialties. The rule of life is quite strict and a number of the houses very poor. The term "idiorhythmic" here has no pejorative connotation. It simply means that each house maintains its own way of life.

Common-life Scetes. These are a legal fiction of the last century, chiefly a fruit of the flood of Russian monks, although the Rumanians were faced with the same problem and accepted the same solution. Unable to acquire lands beyond the one monastery in their possession—and even that one, having fallen into Greek hands in the eighteenth century, had to be wrested back through an unedifying combination of intrigue and bribery[4]—the Russians created huge establishments, notably Saint Andrew's Scete and the Scete of the Prophet Elias, numbering hundreds of monks but without the privileges of the ruling monasteries. The Rumanians, having no monastery, followed suit with their Scete of the Forerunner. For all purposes other than the technical state of dependency on an inevitably smaller Greek monastery, these were common life monasteries. They could not, however, use the title "monastery," nor that of "abbot" (*hegoumenos*) for their priors. Nonetheless, the latter ruled over their communities precisely as abbots. Only the Rumanian scete remains as of any importance, and that importance may grow in coming years.

Huts and Hermitages. These are concentrated chiefly at the southern end of the peninsula, the "deserts" of Karoulia, Katounakia, and Little Saint Anne's. Here the hermits live, sometimes in caves, sometimes in rickety shacks trembling on the cliffsides above the Aegean, sometimes in more substantial buildings housing the elder and one or more disciples. Most of the sayings in our "Paterikon" below come from the men living this way of life. Theirs is the hardest way, steep, rocky, and fierce, with always the danger of delusion and even of outright madness—it is not unknown on Athos for hermits to throw themselves off their cliffs in, so it is believed, the fatally mistaken idea they can fly like angels. Yet it is also from among these men, both on Athos and elsewhere in the Orthodox world, that those with the greatest charismata have usually come. It is in its deserts that Athos most clearly embodies the Christian paradox of a loving God and human freedom. These men are free, free to choose the holy or the demonic, and the line between the two runs here at once at its narrowest and its most absolute. Here, too, is the third and oldest paradigm of monastic life, that of Saint Antony the Great, the original hermit and "father of monks."

The Cells (kellia). As a category, these fall in between the hermits and the idiorhymthic scetes. The cells are separate buildings, or clusters of buildings, neither belonging to a scete nor a monastery, but very like one of the houses making up a scete and of about that size, that is, sufficient to house one monk or several in obedience to an elder. Each however, unlike a scete, is quite independent, except for the rent it owes the monastery that owns the property. Often, these function in fact as "mini-monasteries," complete communities practicing the common life and under obedience to a single elder. Cells such as Bourazeri, between Karyes and Iveron, have in recent times even rivaled the number of monks in one or more of the ruling monasteries. In the days before Father Charalampus had taken his community to Dionysiou—a time this writer remembers—over twenty monks lived in this cell. More commonly, however, the largest cells will number from five to eight and the smallest only one. The latter are usually—and perhaps now, with

the disappearance of the idiorhythmic monasteries, uniquely—the sources of those scandalous stories one hears about monkish lusts and luxuries. Answerable to no one, and perhaps in possession of personal wealth, a lone monk could set himself up very comfortably, and a number have done just that over the years. Not all of them, by any means, but the observant visitor can still pick out the occasional television aerial—usually in the region of Karyes—and, when he does, he can be fairly certain that he is looking at the house of a *kelliotes*, a cell-dweller. *Caveat peregrinus*, let the pilgrim beware!

The Day of a Monk

In his sixteenth catechetical discourse, Saint Symeon the New Theologian outlines a typical day for the monks in the monastery, Saint Mamas in Constantinople, of which he was the abbot.[5] Although written a thousand years ago, his description is substantially identical with the day of a typical Athonite *koinovion*.

The monk "must rise at midnight before the night office and recite the prescribed prayer."[6] Midnight here means just that, or even, if the monk's canon (rule) of prayer is long, even well before. The "prescription" will have come from his spiritual father, usually the abbot. This may take an hour, four hours, or still more. The rule today, as perhaps it was for Saint Symeon (though he nowhere specifies it), is normally the Jesus prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me") interspersed with prostrations and reading from the psalms, other scriptures, or the fathers.

"After so doing, he must rise with all to go to the service of praise, and with attention and vigilance go through the whole service."[7] The "service of praise" today includes the services of "Midnight Prayer" (*mesonyktikon*) and Matins (*orthros*). In a typical Athonite monastery these will last from two to three hours, beginning at around one or two in the morning and concluding at four or five. To keep awake, let alone stand "with attention and vigilance" as the saint requires here, demands a considerable effort. In some monasteries there is, or used to be, a monk especially assigned to go around the stalls of the brethren and nudge awake any who had dozed off. This writer recalls the abbot of Simonos

Petras periodically making the circuit of stalls himself to see if all his chicks were present and at attention—we can also recall being nudged back into wakefulness by the same. "Once the morning office of praise is finished, do not... start talking to anyone... and so be distracted... Rather, pray in the solitude of your cell and when you have recited the appointed prayer with tears and great recollection, take on some physical labor and go off at once to perform it."[8]

Saint Symeon's monastery had a break between Matins and the daily Divine Liturgy. The latter is also the norm in many Athonite monasteries, for example, Dionysiou, but in some such as Simonos Petras, the Liturgy will follow immediately on the conclusion of Matins and the First Hour (Prime). Symeon's break is evidently for several hours, so we can assume that his Eucharist began around 9 a.m. and lasted, as today, about an hour or slightly more. The reader should note that the fast from food or drink continues even after work has begun. Then, during Liturgy: "Stand with trembling as though you were seeing the Son of God being offered in sacrifice for you. If you are worthy and have received the necessary absolution, approach with fear and joy to communicate in the ineffable blessing."[9]

The saint here seems to assume some frequency in the reception of the Eucharist. Until recent times, this was not the case on Mount Athos. Rather, the sacrament would be approached on average about once a month, and then only after three days fasting. One of the striking features of the current renewal is the taking seriously of Saint Nicodemus's preaching on "continual communion," such that "the 'medicine of immortality' is assuming a centrality that it has not had for many generations."[10] Following the Liturgy: "Go to the table with everybody, and do not separate yourself from your brethren... Sit in total recollection and silence without talking to anyone at all, but pay attention to the reading and so be nourished in soul, no less than in body."[11]

Because of the gap between Matins and Eucharist, Saint Symeon has the *trapeza* (refectory, meal) immediately following the service. In several houses on Athos, Simonos Petras among them, the main meal will come several hours after the Liturgy. In both cases, however, it will

be taken at around 10 or 11 a.m. It is both lunch and the breaking of the fast which, if the monk has a long canon of prayer, may have thus lasted for over twelve hours. Meals are taken in silence, no conversation, and one of the brethren will be assigned to read aloud to the company from a work such as a saint's life or sermons. "After you have risen from the meal,.. run off to your cell in silence, shut your door and pick up your book. When you have read it a short time... lie down on your mat and take a short nap... [then] take hold of your manual work and continue with it until the wood gives the signal for the singing of the office of lamp-lighting [Vespers]."[12]

Reading is encouraged in Saint Symeon's as it is in most—though not all—of the monasteries today on Athos. A brief siesta is also frequent today, especially in view of the fact that many of the monks sleep relatively little during the night. The main period of work in the monastery then begins. The jobs are varied, from cook to librarian, stable hand to office work, and will normally take up around four to five hours. Certain jobs require more time, and the monks assigned to them will have the necessary permission to miss certain of the services. Vespers begins between 3 and 4 p.m., and, as the other services, is signaled by the rhythmic hammering of a long wooden board, the *semantron*, whose distinctive—not to say attention-getting—sound is one of the distinguishing marks of an Orthodox monastery. "When the service of lamp-lighting is over, if you have the strength to deprive yourself completely of eating and drinking... you will derive no little benefit... If not, then content yourself with one dry biscuit and a cup of water."[13]

The rule was a little more strict in Saint Symeon's monastery than in most Athonite houses today. Normally in the latter, there will be a second full *trapeza* following Vespers on four days of the week (outside of Great Lent). On fasting days, which is to say Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, no formal meal is offered. There will, though, be a collation for the weaker brethren (among whom this writer was always to be numbered), and usually it will be something more substantial than the saint's biscuit and cup of water—cold bean soup, for example, with some bread and olives. Nothing with oil, however, let alone cheese or

eggs (forbidden on fasting days) will be offered. Meat is never served at any time. "After you have offered your evening prayers to God together with your brethren, make a reverence before the feet of your superior, as at the feet of Christ Himself. Receive his blessing, kiss the holy icons of the saints, and go in silence to your cell without saying a word to anyone."[14]

Again, Saint Symeon's is marginally more strict a rule than would be found in most monasteries today. The evening prayers, Compline or *Apodeipnon* (literally, "after supper"), is, as with Symeon, said together in the narthex of the monastery church. It can come, as above, immediately after the second meal or collation, or roughly an hour to an hour and a half later—that is, around 6 p.m. or sundown. Unlike Saint Symeon, though, the period between supper and Compline or just after the latter, depending on the placement of the service, is the one time of day set aside for what Western monastics call "recreation"—that is, light conversation (which one hopes will be edifying), fellowship with the brethren or guests, or a stroll on the monastery grounds. With nightfall, however, the monks are to be in their cells and conversation is forbidden until after services the following day. "Once you have closed your door, pick up your book, and read about six pages with attention. Then stand for prayer... Your singing of psalms and number of prostrations and the length of time that you stand must correspond to your ability and fortitude... When you have finished your prayer, once again read a little, then watch through the night until the third hour [9 p.m.] then... sign your whole body with the Cross, and lie down on your mat... until midnight."[15]

The saint prescribes an evening of prayer both before and after sleep. This may vary today. The night vigil may come either before a brief sleep prior to morning prayers, or else will follow rest and continue directly into the services. The latter, for example, is the pattern followed at Philotheou and at Simonos Petras. In all cases the time set aside for sleep is relatively little. Saint Symeon's prescription, allowing about one to two hours for the midday nap, is four to five hours a day. This is not unusual today, though more rest may be allowed the weaker fathers. There are

also monks for whom a great deal less sleep is the norm (see Father "N" in the "Paterikon" below). The custom of sleeping on the ground, Saint Symeon's "mat," instead of on a mattress still applies today.

The schedule given above is roughly normative, but different seasons of the church year bring changes. Lent in particular alters the day's rhythm. Services are longer and fasting is severe. As well, there is the periodic vigil (*agrypnia*) celebrated in the monasteries on the occasion of feast days, perhaps around thirty-five to fifty times a year. On these occasions the monks will nap a little more in the afternoon, and then will spend the night in church for the services. The latter can be as long as twelve to fifteen hours, although usually they are shorter and allow for another rest of a couple of hours between the close of Matins and beginning of Divine Liturgy.

In the scetes and hermitages and cells the daily rhythm will differ substantially. Where the monasteries derive their income from the land of Athos, chiefly via the exploitation of the Mountain's forests and assisted by endowments and some properties on the Greek mainland, and can thus limit the monks' work to the amount of labor required simply to keep the monastery running, the other monastic groups are obliged to feed themselves exclusively by their own efforts. This in turn requires more time, and it is thus quite rare to find the cycle of daily services, for example, observed in its entirety. While some six to eight hours a day may be dedicated to common worship in the *koinovion* (about six at Simonos Petras and eight or more at Dionysiou), the scetes and cells will often spend about half that time in chapel, or even less. The hermits will obviously go long periods without any formal liturgical observance. Clearly, this does not mean that prayer is necessarily neglected. The hermits' whole twenty-four hour day is one long "cell-rule" or canon. Their poverty is normally extreme and their work, like that of the original Egyptian monks consisting of plaiting their palm leaf baskets and singing psalms the while,[16] is chosen to be such a kind as to provide the minimum income necessary to sustain life while at the same time not interfering with the rhythms of the Jesus prayer. We find them thus weaving prayer ropes (*komboskhini*) to sell later, or

else carving the wooden seals needed to stamp the loaves for the Eucharist. In the cells and scetes a regime close to that the hermits may be in force, for example in the one-time houses of Joseph the Hesychast at New Scete or Father Charalampus at Bourazeri where the monks observed night-long vigils in their cells. More commonly, though, it is considerably ameliorated.

Work, private prayer, and corporate worship are the three elements basic to monastic life in all circumstances, and an emphasis placed on any one of the three will necessarily affect the other two. Each community, whether a large coenobium or a cell of two or three, is obliged to strike the particular balance it deems best. The range of possibilities Athos offers is considerable, and it is up to the young man with a monastic vocation to search out and discover the place and elder to which he feels best suited—or, as the Greeks put it, "where his soul finds rest" (ἐκεῖ ποὺ ἀναπαύεται ἡ ψυχή του). Such "shopping" is encouraged, and the postulant may try several places before settling on one or another. On occasion, he will be referred by one community or elder to another which the latter thinks more suited to his temperament and needs. Once settled, his novitiate never lasts less than one year, rarely more than three. He is then tonsured into the "great" or "little habit."[17] The tonsure is believed to be permanent, a sacrament,[18] and commitment to the community lifelong, although movement afterwards is not unknown.

So Different a Life?

Given the life described above, so poor in worldly pleasures of any kind, so rigorous in terms of ascetic demands, one might justly wonder why anyone would choose it. We shall turn to that "why" in the concluding section of this essay, and with it touch on the larger "why"—that is, why and how this way of life has played so central a role in the Church. For the moment, though, and by way of a conclusion to this account of Athonite life, let us consider the apparent disparities between the monks' way of life and that of the society from which they come. We begin with:

Diet. This is the one feature that most strikes the visitor from America or Western Europe. The labors of the monk at vigil in his cell escape the notice of a first-time observer. What he does notice, immediately, is an experience like the following:

> It was pre-dawn on a Sunday morning in January and the snow lay six inches deep on the ledges outside the refectory windows. I knew this last detail because the windows were wide open—the abbot did not like the smell of cooking fish and the fathers on duty had decided to air out the room some thirty minutes before the meal was due to be eaten. The air was certainly fresh, and only a few degrees above freezing. As the young monks were anxious not to miss receiving Holy Communion, they had opened the windows at the same time as they were setting out the portions. When I thus arrived at my place at the guests' table and glanced down, shivering, at my meal, my gaze was challenged by the eye of an even colder fish glaring up at me from beneath a pool of deep green, gelid olive oil. We stared at each other for a time, locked in combat, the fish issuing its challenge, "Bet you can't," while hunger struggled with revulsion in me. It was a short war and the fish won. It lay unmarked while I blunted my appetite with some greens and cheese. The monks, on the other hand, suffered no such inhibitions.[19]

The meal just described was a *festal* one. On other, fasting days, the fare is considerably poorer. This writer can recall seeing a group of German visitors staring gloomily at bowls of cold lentil soup (the recipe: pulse and water, boil and serve) only to receive a further shock from the guestmaster. Noting their dismay, the worthy father seemed momentarily troubled. Not for long. His expression brightened directly and he hurried out of the room, only to return moments later, beaming, and carrying a large blue, plastic pitcher of the sort that one waters plants with. "Shame on me," he chuckled (in Greek), "to have forgotten that you're

travelling and entitled to a dispensation for oil." So saying, and certain that he was bestowing ineffable delights on his charges, he proceeded to pour at least half a cup of thick cold, olive oil into each of their bowls. Fortunately, he seemed to have mistaken the dumb horror in their eyes for startled pleasure and had left the room again before they could give more forceful expression to their dismay.

Not all reactions to Athonite dining are quite so depressed. John Covell smacks his lips over the "best monkish fare" set out for him on his visit in 1677: "... excellent fish... oyl, salat, beanes, hortechockes, beets... chees, onions, garlic... "[20] Two hundred eighty years later, Sydney Loch, writing of a meal at Hilandar, gives a similar picture: "I sat down, the single guest, to a cabbage salad, stockfish, salted herring, slabs of white cheese, brown bread, fried potatoes, and a decanter of wine... The traveller may occasionally strike a plate of cold, clammy beans as the guestmaster's sole offering, and when this happens in two or three successive monasteries, as it may during a fast, he usually flees the Mountain and touches on his sufferings in his resulting books and lectures."[21]

Quite so. Curzon provides a horrifying picture of a meal at Great Lavra in the 1830s,[22] Riley laments similar experiences fifty years later,[23] while Norwich and Sitwell in the 1960s take no chances and come to the Mountain amply provided with their own rations—though they miss no occasion in noting unmemorable meals with the monks.[24] The litany may be, as above, easily extended into the present.

Yet, at their root, these complaints derive in fact more from cultural differences than from any particular severity on the monks' part. By and large, and with the exception of notable ascetics,[25] Athonite fare is substantially the same as that of ordinary Greeks. The latter have never, at least since classical times, been much for a rich and varied diet: "The Greek muleteer today can keep going for days on a loaf of bread and a few olives, and his ancestor of classical times was just as frugal. Barley-meal, olives, a little wine, fish as relish, meat only on high holidays—such was the normal diet... the usual Attic dinner consisted of two courses, the first a kind of porridge, and the second a kind of porridge. It was a sparse diet—though suitably... interrupted by drinking

parties."[26] Substitute beans for porridge and you have the village diet of the modern Greek (at least of a few years ago—meat has since become far more frequent with the new prosperity). Subtract meat entirely—and, naturally, the drinking parties—and you have the Athonite regime. Even the long morning fasts represent a feature of life in both ancient[27] and contemporary Greece. "Breakfast" is not a native concept. One can find it on hotel menus, usually spelled out painfully in English or phonetic Greek, but nowhere else. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other nationalities present on Athos, the Russians with their interminable *kasha* and hundred-year-old soup,[28] the Bulgarians' love of pickled peppers, and the Rumanians' distressing predilection for something that resembles *polenta*. It is always basic, peasant food. Be it noted, too, that the monks' diet during fasting seasons is the same as is expected of (though not always observed by) every Orthodox Christian.

Prayer and Vigil. What of the other, less visible features of Athonite life, the few hours of sleep and hard labor in pursuit of God? Part of our modern objection to, or at least discomfort with, these efforts may stem simply from the fact that they are directed toward God. As Helen Waddell remarked some years ago in connection with the founders of monasticism:

> How many have died or been maimed in chemical or biological research... how many dead and still to die in the conquest of the air, or in that last exploration which gives this generation its nearest approach to religious ecstasy, the annihilation of speed in space?... It is not that these are not grieved for: but they are not grudged. No generous spirit will shirk the arduous, provided it be unknown. We do not grudge it that these should have left wife and children and lands for the flick of a needle on the speedometer, or "a still life of a pair of old shoes" [ref. to Gauguin and Van Gogh]. The only field of research in which a man may not make sacrifices, under pain of being called a fanatic, is God.[29]

To be sure, there are elements in the labors we have described that seem peculiarly monastic, and thus "fanatical" according to the mindset Ms. Waddell describes. On closer inspection, however, we find that there are fewer differences with generally Christian practice than might have been expected. The night watches, vigils, are nothing new to Christian tradition. Christ Himself calls for them expressly[30] and Himself sets the example.[31] The *Didache,* a Christian document from the early second century, seems to expect it,[32] and it is explicitly recommended by Saint Hippolytus in the early third century: "At midnight arise, wash thy hands with water, and pray. And if thy wife is with thee, pray ye both together... be not slothful in prayer."[33] The custom is not confined, either, to Christian antiquity. It seems, judging from the recent *Life* of Saint Arsenius of Cappadocia,[34] to have been relatively common in Greek Asia Minor in the opening years of this century, and it surely continues in places in the Orthodox world to the present day.[35]

Even the Greek—and generally eastern Mediterranean—secular world presents its analogue. Usually up at or before first light, the typical Greek (excluding bureaucrats) spends his day in frantic activity, ever alert and with an eye perpetually open for the main chance. The very word for "clever" or "bright" in modern Greek, *exhypnos,* means literally "awake." He takes his nap at midday, as do the monks, and then duplicates the morning's activity far into the night. He was no different in ancient times,[36] nor, for that matter, in the Byzantine middle ages when Athos was beginning its rise—at least if Saint Symeon the New Theologian is any indication.[37] Although our American expectations of leisure are commonly quite different, still something analogous might be found in our own "workaholism," as well as in the expectations of many of our employers: the job is all, and the employee expected to sacrifice himself or herself to its demands. It is only—and we are back to Ms. Waddell—when such efforts are directed Godwards that our eyebrows begin to go up.

Family: a Genuine Break. If there is one area where the Athonite, and Orthodox monk in general, suffers a sharp disjunction with respect to

his former life in "the world," then that is in his cutting his ties with society and, especially, with family. The Greek, ancient and modern, is a news addict. It is no accident that this writer has heard more than one abbot expatiate at length, and on more than one occasion, on the deadly perils for monastic life concealed in the ubiquitous Greek phrase, *ti nea*, "what's new?"[38] Even more than the delights of politics, the inescapable and unending subject of debate wherever there is more than one Greek present, it is family that is the great sacrifice. Tears and wailing, recriminations and threats from the sacrificed, as well as stern warnings from the other quarter to stand fast, are a staple of monastic literature from its beginnings,[39] through the middle ages,[40] to the present day.[41] The knot of family connections, its power and centrality—one might even argue, its pathology—in Greek life is more dense than anywhere else in the Orthodox world. Serbs are tribal and Russians more prone to attach themselves to larger groupings. For the Greek, family is all: connections, networking, patronage—a sociology and psychology that go back at least to Byzantium.[42] The words of an Athonite abbot to this writer, while generally true, carry a peculiar power and meaning in the Greek context: "We Christians are not meant to live alone. We are called to be part of a family. We thus have a choice: we can either make a new family [i.e., marry], or join an existing one [become monks]." To choose the first, although certainly worthy and blessed by Church and Tradition, is still to remain within the circles of blood and kinship, nor will it elicit cries of outrage from near and dear (unless, of course, it is marriage to the "wrong" person—Greek matches are still often arranged with all the diplomacy and bargaining of a state alliance). To choose the second, on the other hand, is really and truly a break with the "world," a kind of death, and it is accompanied by the same sort of mourning as would be expected at a funeral. One's kin will respond to it as to a desertion, an abandonment, a kind of familial apostasy. The Athonite, in particular the Greek Athonite, genuinely does depart here from the secular norm. He has, in embracing the family of monks, left the "world" and set out on the road to a different society.

Now, at last, we may address the question of this difference, the "why" of its importance and its appeal.

WHY MONKS?

The Nature of Christianity and of the Church

> But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God.
>
> —*1 Cor. 1:23–24*

> And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another.
>
> —*2 Cor. 3:18*

> This is what it means to find one's own soul: to see God, and in His light to become higher than all creation.
>
> —*Saint Symeon the New Theologian,*
> Letter on Confession, *14*

> Compared to the divine light, the light of the world—even the sun at noon—is only darkness. Strange thing: at that time there takes place a communion, a union of the Infinite and Uncreated with men who are created and limited.
>
> —*Father Joseph the Hesychast, d. 1958*

Each of these three sources, Saints Paul, Symeon the New Theologian, and Joseph the Hesychast, is writing at a millennium's distance from the other. Yet each is also writing, so the Orthodox Church would maintain, of one and the same experience, one and the same encounter with the one Lord, Jesus Christ. Each would see this encounter as the heart of the Gospel; that everyone may have and know the crucified and risen Christ within his or her own heart: "He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to Him... We will come to him and make Our home in him,"[1] and, "This is life everlasting,

that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent."[2] All three of our sources, and with them the Church, would also understand this as the key to the reading of Christ's preaching concerning the Kingdom of God. According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is "at hand,"[3] yet hidden, a "mustard seed,"[4] a bit of leaven,[5] a pearl,[6] a treasure "concealed in a field,"[7] and within us.[8] To obtain it, however, means abandoning all else, whether "house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for My sake and for the Gospel."[9] It means death, the cross: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."[10] The cross, as Saint Paul indicates in our first quotation, is not merely the mode of the Lord Jesus' own redemptive death, but the one and unique portal for all who would enter His Kingdom and share in His Resurrection. In all three of the Synoptic Gospels the story of our Lord's Transfiguration, the Gospel event and continuing experience that lies behind the remarks of Saints Symeon and Joseph (and perhaps behind the second quotation from Saint Paul as well),[11] is both prefaced and followed by a reminder of the cross.[12]

The nature of Christianity and Christian life is thus paradox: life in death, light in darkness, joy in pain, resurrection through the cross. In saying this we are, of course, saying nothing new. Saint Paul's epistles are full of it. For example: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken... always carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh."[13]

The Church of Christ, too, is paradox. It is at once the community of those suffering for and with Christ, and the reality of His presence. It is never, either in the New Testament or in the Fathers, identified with buildings, institutions, or even with its own officers, that is, bishops and clergy. Rather, it is "one body in Christ,"[14] His own body, through which the Christian has "died to the law" so that he or she "may belong to

another, to Him Who has been raised from the dead,"[15] and in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."[16] The Church—let us recall the passage we quoted at the beginning of this essay—is the mountain of God, "Zion... the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,"[17] and the new creation, the world which has been remade in Christ and "has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the Glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb."[18] This new and different life and society, the company of the saints and of "innumerable angels in festal gathering,"[19] belongs clearly to the eschaton, the end of the world we know, and at present is "hid with Christ in God."[20] It is hidden, but still present and discernable for those who would seek it before anything else, since, in Christ, all has already been accomplished "once and for all."

The Martyrs. Hidden yet present, at work unseen yet now and then glimpsed and known, this is the life and polity, the society, which the monk seeks to join and embody in his own life and community. Not that monasticism comprises some kind of "para-church," elite and different in kind from the mass of Christian believers. Not at all. As we have just seen, this sense of the Church and its meaning was alive in Christianity from its origins. The martyrs provide a steady "witness"—the root meaning of the word "martyr"—to its continuance in the early Christian centuries. Saint Stephen sees Christ in glory while being stoned to death.[21] Saint Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 115), on the road to his death in the Coliseum, writes to the Roman church in terms which underline the paradox: "I write to you in the midst of life, yet lusting after death. My lust hath been crucified, and there is not fire of material longing in me, but only water living and speaking in me, saying within me, Come to the Father... I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ... and for a draught, I desire His blood, which is love incorruptible."[22] He asks that they make no intercession for him before the authorities, but instead: "Grant me nothing more than that I be poured out a libation to God, while there is still an altar ready,"[23] and adds: "Suffer me to receive the pure light... Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God."[24]

In the classical account of Christian martyrdom, the one that would be virtually the model for all accounts that would follow, Saint Polycarp of Smyrna (d. ca. 150) recalls the eucharistic imagery of Ignatius, whom he knew, in seeing his death at the stake as the fulfillment of his life as a believer for "eighty and six years," and as participation in the Lord's life and triumph: "I bless Thee for that Thou hast granted me this day and hour, that I might receive a portion amongst the number of martyrs in the cup of [Thy] Christ unto the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit. May I be received among these in Thy presence this day as a rich and acceptable sacrifice..."[25] The martyr was the unquestioned hero of the early Church, the Christian *par excellence*, and the model held up for all to imitate. Eusebius reports, for example, that the young Origen was so anxious to follow his father Leonidas's example in dying for Christ that his mother "hid all his clothing and compelled him to stay at home."[26]

Where martyrdom was not an imminent possibility, the Church cultivated ascetics. 1 Tim. 5:3 and following makes special reference to the "enrolling" of older women in what appears to have been a special order, the "widows," in the young church and whose particular duty it was to "continue in supplications and prayers night and day" (verse 5). In the late third century, Saint Methodius of Olympus dedicates a special treatise to the "virgins" in his community,[27] and, at about the same time, Saint Antony places his sister in the keeping of a "house of virgins" before setting out on his calling to the ascetic life.[28]

The Christian empire. The world changed in A.D. 323 with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine and his victory over Licinius. The Church was no longer persecuted, and the sharp paradox of its life in the world was in danger of becoming muted, if not of vanishing entirely. The same Eusebius, an eyewitness of these events, thought them absolutely wonderful: "Men had now lost all fear of their former oppressors; day after day they kept dazzling festival; light was everywhere, and men who once dared not look up greeted each other with smiling faces and shining eyes. They danced and sang in the city and country alike... Old

troubles were forgotten, and all irreligion passed into oblivion."[29] If this sounds a little like kingdom come, it is not accidental, and therein lay the problem. Every victory in the world carries with it a certain ambiguity, whether it be something so recent as the war in the Persian gulf, the dissolution of Bolshevik tyranny, or, as here in the past, the triumph of Christianity over pagan Rome. Churches, many and splendid to be sure, were built by the newly Christian emperor. Who can deny the glories and Christian truth of Byzantine Church art and architecture that were to follow?[30] The same goes for the Ecumenical Councils, the great missionary enterprises of empire and papacy in Eastern and Western Europe respectively, and the rise and articulation of a Christian culture. All these are fruits of Constantine's conversion and the subsequent rise of "Christendom"[31]—that is, the idea of Church and state as a single entity, one society governed spiritually by the clergy and temporally by the emperor. It was a great moment and a great idea.

Yet, the dangers were at least as great. Clergy, and especially higher clergy, became officers of the state. State supported, state encouraged, they were often as well state appointed and state manipulated. From persecuted it was all too easy to become persecutors. From poverty and the certain implication of danger, it was quickly commonplace to view the Church as a promising "career." From life and meaning for the believer, it was fatally easy for the Church and its faith to become an "opiate of the masses" and justification for society's powerful. The "shock value" of Christianity was in danger of disappearing and with it the Faith's own true and transfiguring essence. Had that well and truly happened, then Christianity would have disappeared along with "Christendom." However great they may be, mere ideas are mortal.

The monastic antidote. Christianity has not disappeared, and, we would maintain, the reason it did not lies in the "antidote to empire" which God raised up in the form of the monastic movement. It was a sudden flowering. At the beginning of the fourth century Antony is indeed off in the wilderness and attracting some attention, but monks as a group, let alone a massive presence, are as yet unheard of. By the century's end,

however, they number in the tens of thousands in Egypt alone. Yet another hundred and fifty years and monasticism is coterminous with Christianity itself, from the Atlantic coast of Ireland to central Asia and India, and from the mouths of the Rhine to the sources (one of them at least) of the Nile. Saint Athanasius publishes his Life of Antony about a year after the latter's death in 356. Thirty to thirty-five years later the Blessed Augustine finds it on a friend's table near Milan already translated into Latin.[32] Moreover, he observes how the same translation had already inspired two acquaintances in far off Trier (along the Rhine in modern Germany) to take up the monastic way.[33] For the ancient world this was lightning speed indeed, though doubtless it helped that Saint Athanasius had passed through Rome, and Trier as well, during one of his many exiles.

There were certainly sociological and psychological reasons for this remarkable explosion, but for detailed inquiry into these the reader is cordially invited to consult other sources.[34] In brief, just as one could point in the twentieth century to secular causes for the current renewal on Athos, and we listed three that make perfect sense in a wholly "worldly" way, so are there such for the fourth century phenomenon: the hard lot of peasants, the hierarchical nature of the society and the need for ombudsmen, high taxation, the draft, etc., etc. This is all true and certainly not to be denied or belittled. But, and here is our interest, in both cases there is also an imponderable, a "wild card," and again in both cases the "joker" is the same: the appearance of certain remarkable individuals who are immediately, or next to immediately, perceived by a great many faithful as saying and doing, as representing in their very lives, something that is of the essence of the Gospel. Saints Antony and Pachomius, together with Macarius, Poemen, Moses, Arsenius, and the rest in Scete, were understood, in short, as carrying on the Christian life. They represented that paradox that is at the heart of the Christian faith and Church. They did not so much proclaim or teach, but rather lived, the tremendous antinomy of life in death, of dying to the world and witnessing to the Resurrection. They were, in fact, the new martyrs, the "athletes of God" and new heroes of the believers in a setting where

the shedding of blood for Christ was no longer an impending possibility. As Father Aemilianos points out at length below, the connection between monasticism and martyrdom was felt to be real and deep from the moment of the former's first appearance.

In saying "new martyrs" we mean to stress that, in a sense, monasticism arrives much less as a break with the Church of the early centuries, an innovation, than as its continuation in altered circumstances. Those circumstances were, as we noted, on their way toward introducing a genuinely new, and fatal, change into the Church's life. The latter really was in danger of becoming what we all too often take the word "church" to mean today: buildings and prelates, a fixed and powerful "institution" staffed by officers no less worldly and politically minded than the ward-heelers and power brokers who have infested City Hall from Ur of the Chaldees to Chicago of the Daleys. Buildings are important, of course, and even more so institutions. So, too—though how often we must sigh in admitting it—are bishops. Even Saint Symeon the New Theologian, no friend of the authorities in his day, had to admit the last—although he did get in a few good licks on the way.[35] Yet, however important, none of these are the Church. The Church is not of "this world." It is the sacrament of the world to come. And it is that reality, that most basic given of the Gospel, to which the "new" phenomenon of monasticism gave its unmistakable and lastingly fructifying witness.

Thus we find the "shock value" of Athanasius's description of Antony emerging from his desert retreat after twenty years of isolation: "Antony came forth as from a kind of sanctuary, initiated and borne up by God... and they were amazed who saw that his body had the same form [as before], and had neither grown flabby from lack of exercise nor emaciated from fasts and struggles with the demons... And again the character of his soul was pure of blemish, for it was neither contracted as it were by grief nor relaxed by pleasures... He was fully natural... "[36]

But by "natural" (ἐν τῷ κατὰ φύσιν), Athanasius clearly means in a state of original nature, that of unfallen Adam. For, immediately after this picture, he adds: "The Lord through him healed the bodies of many and cleansed others of demons... comforted many who were grieving

and reconciled others who were at strife to friendship... "[37] Antony is a wonderworker, as we see here, and elsewhere teacher,[38] at peace with the animals like Adam in paradise,[39] clairvoyant,[40] gifted with spiritual discernment,[41] endowed by God with wisdom and understanding,[42] elder and father of his disciples,[43] and God's "Physician" to all of Egypt.[44] The "shock" is therefore one of recognition. Here is the new man restored in Christ, made whole and transfigured, the man of the Gospels and the world to come. Although certainly rather idealized, Athanasius's Antony is still recognizably the same man as the somewhat more human Antony we meet in the *Sayings of the Fathers*. Both he and the other "old men" of the desert are figures who step directly out of the atmosphere of the Gospels and prophetic writings. Humble and wise with repentance and "holy mourning,"[45] they are also "spirit-bearers (πνευματοφόροι), ambassadors plenipotentiary of the Kingdom. The Good News of Christ has shaped them, broken them down and re-cast them until it is reflected in their every word and gesture: and they teach as often, if not more often, by the latter as by the former. The wonder that greets Anthony, "and they were amazed" (ἐθαύμαζον), is the same that regularly accompanies Christ's miracles in the Gospels. And not by accident, for it is Christ Who is recognized as acting within Antony: "through him the Lord healed..." The shock, again, is the recognition of something already familiar. There is nothing "new" here, merely the Gospel.

This note of "shock" may, however, be taken in a double sense, negative as well as positive. Both senses serve to highlight one of monasticism's basic functions within the Church and, on behalf of the Church, in the "world." We would categorize it under the heading:

Scandal

> Stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles.
>
> —*1 Cor.1:23*

> They were strangers and exiles on the earth... For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come.
>
> —*Heb. 11:13; 12:14*

> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.
>
> —*1 Cor. 15:17,19*

Ours is a society that loves the practical. If someone is not "doing" something, building a house, fixing cars, making steel, and so forth, he or she is not usually felt to be a useful or contributing element in the community. The "doing" may be less concrete than the examples cited, for instance, teacher, lawyer, computer programmer, salesman, but the latters' work still has a clear place and function in the society. It creates results: students taught, defendants defended or prosecuted, programs created, goods moved. Concrete or more abstract, white collar or blue, these all still have results, works, production (note the rise of the word "productive" in recent years, for everything from paper-pushers to baseball players).

Monks do not fit within this hive of productivity. What, after all, do they "do"? What earthly use is an Antony, a Pachomius, a Mount Athos? The answer is clear: none. Their way of life is unjustifiable by any earthly criterion. The late Father Derwas Chitty put his finger on the nature of the monastic "scandal" in a recollection of his first encounter with Greek monks:

> The heat of an October afternoon in 1925, in the deep gorge of the Wadi Qelt in the mountains behind Jericho: the monastery of Choziba hanging, baked in the sun, at the foot of the northern cliff, and in its church... two spare and shabby Greek lay monks chanting their office on and on with its interminable, tinny, nasal, garbled *Kyrie eleisons*.
>
> A young student, fresh from Oxford, having his first taste of Greek monasticism, was oppressed with a strange desolation. Could this be Reality? But if not—how dreadful! For most of our ways of life some justification would remain even if the faith on which we believe them to be

> based were overthrown. These two peasants—not particularly good monks—were devoted to a life that would be wholly meaningless and outrageous if God were not real, nor the Christian faith true.[46]

This is a life that makes no sense outside of the Christian faith. In the eyes of two pagan writers fourteen hundred years apart, monasticism is an absurd affront to human dignity. Rutilius Claudius Naratianus, quoted here by Helen Waddell, speaks in tones of mingled anger and grief of a one-time friend become a Christian anchorite:

> A credulous exile skulking in the dark,
> Thinking, poor fool, that Heaven feeds on filth,
> Himself to himself more harsh than the outraged gods.
> A worse creed this than ever Circe's poison,
> Men's bodies then turned bestial, now their soul.[47]

In the late eighteenth century Edward Gibbon cannot contain his disgust: "Their credulity debased and vitiated the faculties of the mind: they corrupted the evidence of history; and superstition gradually extinguished the hostile light of philosophy and science... all the manly virtues were oppressed by the servile and pusillanimous reign of the monks."[48] For this gentleman of the Enlightenment monks, in sum, were both cause and symptom of the Roman Empire's decline.

Monasticism's offense to the cultivated, civic piety of a Rutilius or Gibbon was not—is not—confined to non-Christians. We can find similar reactions among Christian writers and scholars, too. Martin Luther in the sixteenth century reacted against the religion of "works" that he saw in the monasticism of his day,[49] and a great Protestant historian of doctrine, Adolph von Harnack in the late nineteenth century, referred to the Life of Antony as the most "stultifying" work of literature ever to afflict Europe.[50] These are but two examples among a multitude. Nor, again, is such an attitude limited to writers in the Protestant tradition. No less a scholar of the ancient world, pagan and Christian, than the late Dominican Father, A.-J. Festugière, fits well within the literature of protest. The good father sees early monastic writings, particularly

in their frequent reference to demons, as bringing to light for the first time the ancient world's common superstitions, the beliefs "of the general masses and especially of country people"[51]—rather an odd statement, we might add, for one whom we can assume had read the Gospels. At any rate, he concludes: "Whence it seems that the ignorance of the monks, their contempt for the ancient culture, far from bringing them closer to God, reduced them to a condition of puerile credulity that was less supra-rational than infra-rational. Not wanting to use reason, this is inevitably to risk falsifying one's judgement... [and] doing battle with shadows."[52] Irrational, superstitious, fanatical, the early monks in this scholar's eyes represent a sad revolt against culture and civilization. Theirs is, again, a "stultifying" atmosphere when compared with the "purer air... of Plato, of Aristotle... of Athens and Greek philosophy."[53]

It is not difficult to find examples of this protest against monasticism in the Orthodox world of today. In this writer's own experience the popular Greek press, for instance, is consistently suspicious of monks in general and, in particular, of the Athonite renewal. Time and again we have run across articles trying to discover some dark plot on Athos, usually of a political nature and involving, directly or indirectly (though a sense of indirection or any subtlety is hard to find in Greek newspapers), the deposed Junta. If it is not a conspiracy, then the reader comes across laments for the misguided sacrifice of otherwise healthy young Greek men or women to this negative, life-denying, wasteful form of self-destruction. "It is," remarked one Greek-American lawyer, "just another form of suicide, only slower."[54]

In a way, of course, these critics through the centuries are all quite correct. By the standards of society, of culture ancient or modern, even of Father Festugière's Christian culture, the early monks whose direct heirs we find on Mount Athos make no sense. They are an affront to the established values of the human commonwealth, a sort of slap in the face. The protest is entirely natural. Yet, although this is a natural reaction, and although the values these different advocates of culture and society uphold are all of genuine worth—learning, reason, philosophy, civic virtue, literature, and the rest—still, their angry exclamations

should evoke some of that same recognition, echoes of the Gospels again, which the discerning reader will have experienced on reading the *Life of Antony* or the *Sayings of the Fathers*. The story of the Lord Jesus Himself, were we to remove faith in the Resurrection, would become an obscure account of misguided fanaticism ending in ignominious and pitiable failure. Christ would be an emblem of wretchedness, as indeed He was for pagan writers in the early centuries, and as He is for certain modern critics of the New Testament. Similarly, the reactions of the Lord's audience in the Gospels, frequently incredulous and often hostile, recall the response of the critics we have just cited to the monks: "This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?"[55]

The heart of it all is faith. Chitty rightly underlines it and so, though in a different key, do those who protest: "credulous," "credulity," "puerile credulity." Whether a pagan poet, an English gentleman, a French Dominican, or a Greek-American lawyer, all object to the monks' simple faith. As well they might, for that faith is absolute. It is uncompromised by any concession to a "larger" usefulness. While monasticism later acquired, or was endowed with, a social role in the new society begun by Constantine, it began—and has essentially remained—as a loud "NO!" addressed to the proposition that any earthly order, be it pagan or Christian, is of ultimate value. "One must not," says Saint Barsanuphius of fifth-century Gaza, "grieve for anything in this world."[56] Only God and paradise lost merit our tears. The words and lives of the Desert Fathers are a constant, single-minded, wholehearted witness to this one and unique ultimacy. They embody the scandal of the cross, and to make any sense out of their lives requires something of their own faith in the Resurrection. This is certainly nothing new in Christianity. It is the same testimony as the martyrs gave, as Christ Himself.

Thus we have the first service of the monks. They are the "proof of things hoped for, the substance of things unseen."[57] Since their origins they have been a standing reminder to the rest of the Christian community that "here we have no lasting city," but are pilgrims, "every fatherland a foreign land."[58] It was an invaluable witness seventeen hundred years ago and, in a century that has seen the "social gospel," "death of

God," "secular city," and "liberation theology"—or, in an Orthodox context, Romantic nationalism—it is no less so today.

But monasticism's gift is not exhausted by its negative witness. Other things follow from living lightly to the world. Perhaps the most important of them is a certain freedom. The monk has cut his (or her) ties and lives, as we have seen, in and for a new and different society. With a gaze directed exclusively toward God's Kingdom, the monk is thus free to judge the kingdoms of the world in God's name, that is, to serve as prophet.

Prophet

> How long will you go on limping on two opinions?
>
> —*1 Kings 18:21*

> The Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, "Go, prophesy to My people Israel."
>
> —*Amos 7:15*

By the word "prophet" we do not mean necessarily predictive powers or foreseeing, though such is recorded of Saint Antony,[59] among others. Amos, whom we cite above, is typical. He is called from his shepherding to go speak God's word to Israel. He is fearless, or what he does fear is not anything mortal. Thus, too, Jeremiah: "Thou art stronger than I and Thou hast prevailed."[60] So with the monks, their fear and their hope are elsewhere, and they can therefore speak with boldness when truth requires it. And they have done just that down the centuries of the Church's history. Antony responds to Athanasius's request and speaks against the Arian heresy at Alexandria.[61] Symeon Stylites rebukes the powerful as well as poor,[62] and his disciple, Daniel, calls emperors and prelates to account before his column in Constantinople.[63] Maximus the Confessor stands alone in the seventh century against emperor, bishops, and senate to declare for truth against the Monothelite heresy.[64] He was vindicated, though not before he had died in exile. John of Damascus, monk of Mar Sabbas in Palestine, provides the first great apology against the iconoclasm of the emperors Leo III and Constantine V in

the eighth century,[65] and in the ninth it is Theodore, abbot of the Studion, who completes the defense of icons at the price of a succession of exiles.[66] Symeon the New Theologian fights a long battle with many of his own monks and a church hierarchy caught up in formalism and legalism against the "heresy of pusillanimity," the belief that we cannot now experience the presence of Christ in the same way as did the saints of old.[67] For some three centuries following his death in 1022 Symeon's message is ignored and even resisted by the church hierarchy,[68] but it was evidently preserved and cherished in the memory of the monks because it flowers again, with increased strength, in the hesychast movement so ably—and not without personal cost—defended by Saint Gregory Palamas.[69] The list may easily be extended into our own day, and the reader will find sufficient references to the modern continuation of the prophetic line of monks in the essays by Father Aemilianos below. We might add that our own Saint Herman should be included. He, too, wrote and spoke on behalf of the Aleut nation to the authorities in Russian Alaska, and suffered in his turn from their displeasure.[70]

The word of prophecy, however, is not simply the expression of a righteous heart or the declaration of a moral conviction. There are many people—for whom God be praised—who have over the course of centuries stood up and spoken out for their principles in the face of massed opposition. This is the mark of a hero particularly dear to Americans, from the film, *Mr. Smith goes to Washington,* to Ralph Nader battling the moguls of industry. Yet neither Jimmy Stewart's character grown hoarse from filibustering nor Mr. Nader, righteous as their causes may be, can rightly be called prophets in the biblical sense. Amos is a "little guy," to be sure, and he is also speaking against the hostile "powers that be" of his age. But there is a difference. The former two are standing up for what they believe is right while Amos is commissioned to speak not his, but God's word. "Thus saith the Lord..." is a formula indicating that the speaker is acting as interpreter or spokesman for One Who is greater than any human conviction and Whose Word is a living and creating force, a power, and greater than the speaker. Jeremiah, in despair of the terrible message he has been given to deliver and of the suffering

he must endure himself from those who would rather not hear it, tries hard not to say it. He finds that this is a Word he cannot not say: "If I say, 'I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot... Cursed be the day on which I was born!"[71]

Similarly, sixteen hundred years later, Symeon the New Theologian finds he cannot remain silent in the face of God's call to speak:

> I wanted to keep silence (and if only I could have),
> but the awesome wonder moves my heart
> and opens up my wholly soiled mouth,
> and forces me, the unwilling,
> both to speak and to write.[72]

Nor is he shy about using a formula much like the scriptural "thus saith":

> All you people! Kings and rulers,
> Priests, bishops, monks, and lay,
> Do not disdain listening to my voice and words, a wretched
> man,
> But open the ears of your heart to me
> And hear and understand what He says
> Who is God of all... [73]

Symeon's words, that is, are actually God's own. The message he has to deliver, however, is a far brighter one than Jeremiah's. In fact, it is the good news itself: "Yea, I beg you, let us strive to see and behold Him even in this life. For if we are found worthy to see Him perceptibly here below we shall not die, 'death will have no dominion over us.' Let us not wait to see Him in the future, but strive to behold Him now."[74] He makes it quite clear, and on many occasions throughout his writings, that he has himself looked upon the light of God and has conversed with Christ:

> Even I, who am of all men the most insignificant and useless, have received some of these gifts... By grace I have received grace... I was given light, and in the light an even

> clearer light. In the midst thereof a sun shone brightly and from it a ray shone forth that filled all things... The divine mind conversed with my own mind, saying, "Do you realize what My power has done to you out of love...? Behold, though you are subject to death, you have become immortal... You live in the world and yet you are with Me... It is in very deed I Who have brought you out of nothing into being... "[75]

Examples from Saint Symeon may easily be multiplied. We invite the interested reader to peruse his writings, virtually complete now in English translation,[76] or to consult the splendid study by the late Archbishop, Basil Krivocheine, which is itself rich in quotations.[77] For our purposes, this saint's prophetic word is such because it derives from a genuinely lived experience, "the union [with God] which takes place in knowledge and perception... in experience and vision."[78] Amos stood up to the high priest at Bethel and King Jereboam II because he knew what God desired and commanded. Jeremiah, as we have seen—together with Isaiah and Ezekiel,[79] to name the three greatest of the Old Testament prophets—also experienced God's call, knew that the Word he was commanded to carry to Israel was not his own creation, but that it was from Another Whose demands he felt in his bones, the Same Whom Isaiah and Ezekiel also knew they had seen. Their words as God's prophets, spokesmen, were therefore legitimate, sanctioned. They spoke "with authority and not as the scribes."

Saint Symeon, whom we have chosen as our preferred example of the monastic prophet, is admittedly unique in certain respects: "the first Eastern Christian mystic who articulated in such personal disclosures his intimate... experiences for a reading public."[80] Yet he would have insisted, and did insist ferociously, that his views were not any kind of innovation. He saw himself instead, and was, "in the consciousness of many of his contemporaries... a great spiritual renovator, a restorer of a lost tradition of mystical life."[81] It is the monks who have most consistently witnessed to this "mystical tradition." From their inception they have also understood that it includes the prophetic word.[82] The formula,

"Speak me a word, elder, that I may be saved (εἶπε μοι λόγον, γέροντα, ἵνα σωθῶ)" which occurs repeatedly in the *Sayings of the Fathers*, refers to just this kind of word: "It was not a theological explanation, nor was it counseling... it was a word... which would give life to the disciple if it were received."[83]

The early monks quite consciously saw themselves, in particular their seniors or elders, as belonging "to a historical tradition, to a religious group whose place could be clearly identified, not only in the history of the Church, but in the longer and more general history of God's dealing with mankind... highlighted by the life of Moses, the teaching of the prophets, and the coming of Christ."[84] The desert fathers spoke with authority "because God could indeed reveal hidden things, and even His own person, to those He might choose."[85] Their followers were "disciples of holy men, and the links between one generation and another were traced with care."[86] If the prophetic tradition continues in the Church, and to this very day, it has been preserved primarily—though never exclusively[87]—among the monks. Recalling the passage we cited above from Saint Symeon on the "golden chain" of saints, we turn to Bishop Kallistos (Ware) on the succession of an authority in the Church which is not priestly—the monks of the Orthodox Church, as at their beginnings (see Father Aemilianos's remarks in this subject below), remain layfolk in their majority—but, precisely, prophetic. "There are in a sense two forms of apostolic succession within the life of the Church. First there is the visible succession of the hierarchy, the unbroken series of bishops in different cities... Alongside this, largely hidden, existing on a "charismatic" rather than an official level, there is secondly the apostolic succession of the spiritual fathers and mothers in each generation of the Church—the succession of the saints... "[88]

The distinction here is central. Monks are not priests, at least in their primary vocation. Their authority does not then derive from particular sacramental actions, though the sacraments are as vital to them as to any Christian, but to the free and unpredictable action of the Holy Spirit. We thus arrive at the third witness of monasticism. It is charismatic.

Charismatic

> Men of Judea... this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And in the last days I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh."
>
> —*Acts 2:14–17*

> And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, Whom the world can not receive...
>
> —*John 14:16–17*

> The glory which Thou hast given to Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and Thou in Me.
>
> —*John 17:22–23*

Whatever truth one may choose to see in the "charismatic revival," in "pentecostalism," there is no denying the conviction of the people involved in this originally American (but increasingly international) phenomenon these past eighty-five years (dating from the original Azusa street revival in 1906)[89] that they are taking part in, experiencing, the immediate gift of the Holy Spirit just as He was poured out on the Apostles at Pentecost. This, they tell us, is the true mark of the Christian, in contrast both to "the Catholic," who "has normally tended to 'channel' the Spirit through bishop and sacrament," and "the Protestant [who channels Him] through the Bible."[90] In addition to those who identify themselves specifically with the different bodies which have since sprung up out of this movement (e.g., Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ, etc.), millions from both the great historical traditions of the West are increasingly laying claim to the distinctive "Pentecostal" experiences of "Spirit baptism" and "speaking in tongues." Even leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, notably the late Cardinal Suenens of Belgium, have seen in this movement the "best hope for the renewal of the Church in the closing decades of this century."[91]

In light of our remarks so far, it should be clear that the Orthodox Church has always had—or better, been—a charismatic movement, has always been aware that the experience of the Holy Spirit is the heart of the Gospel and, in addition, has always known that this experience is not limited to (though never separate from or in opposition to) the "channels" of priest or sacrament, nor confined, safe and remote, to the pages of the Scriptures. The same experience Saint Paul and the Apostles had, so Saint Symeon the New Theologian tells us, is ours to have as well: "You say that he [Saint Paul] will think it a dishonor if I should want and strive to become such as he? No, my brother, there is no envy among God's holy ones... there is neither lust, nor appetite for precedence nor superior joy. For the saints and those who generation after generation show themselves friends and prophets of God there is a single precedence of seating and preference of position, and glory, and rest, and delight: to see God."[92]

It is true that modern charismaticism is not unknown among the Orthodox. It is found, for example, in certain parishes and clergy of the Greek and Antiochian Archdioceses in America, or in Russia and Rumania. But the latter countries have been in a peculiarly difficult position these past decades, nor is it clear that the Pentecostals there were ever Orthodox. In the case of our people here in the United States, we would submit that the absence of a vibrant monasticism provides a clue to the attractions of the American phenomenon, and, until the need is met, it is likely that Pentecostalism will continue to attract. This applies, by the way, across the board of Orthodox "jurisdictions," not just to the Greeks and Syrians.

Which brings us to our point. Since their origins in the fourth century, the monks have provided our primary and indispensable witness to the gifts (*charismata*) of the Holy Spirit, our "proof" that the new age in Christ has truly been inaugurated. Let us recall the list of gifts Saint Athanasius ascribes to Saint Antony, the "father of monks." He is clairvoyant, discerning, a healer, father, counselor, physician. He is "whole," but his wholeness is not the product of a sudden rush of enthusiasm, of an overmastering emotional experience such as seems to be

promulgated by our American charismatics. Antony's health, *salus*, is the product and fruit of long exercise, *ascesis*. Here there is a great difference between the modern movement and the traditional, Orthodox understanding of the Spirit and His gifts.

At the beginning of the *Sayings of the Fathers*, Saint Antony is shown in difficulties, suffering from the temptation of listlessness in the midst of his ascetic labors. He asks God for help and is shown "a man like himself sitting at his work, getting up to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope [the main livelihood of the early fathers], then getting up to pray again. It was an angel of Lord sent to correct and reassure him. He heard the angel saying to him, 'Do this and you will be saved.' At these words, Antony was filled with joy and courage. He did this and was saved."[93] Do your work, endure, be patient, and you will be saved is the first part of the message here. The monks recall frequently the words of Christ in Saint Luke's Gospel: "By your endurance you will gain your souls."[94] There are no shortcuts to the knowledge of the Spirit: "A brother said to Abba Antony, 'Pray for me.' The old man said to him, 'I will have no mercy upon you, nor will God have any, if you yourself do not make an effort and if you do not pray to God.'"[95] The work demanded is conformity to the Gospel call for repentance, and it is lifelong: "Abba Antony said to Abba Poemen, 'This is the great work of a man: always to take the blame for his own sins before God and to expect temptation to his last breath.'"[96] This is not a matter of confidence in one's own efforts to achieve salvation. Monastic spirituality is not Pelagian: "Do not trust in your own righteousness," says Antony again to Poemen.[97] Quite the contrary, the monk's efforts result in, and are dependent upon, a sense of his or her own complete dependence on God's mercy: "Abba Antony said, 'I saw the snares that the enemy [the devil] spreads out over the world and I said groaning, "What can get through from such snares?" Then I heard a voice saying to me, "Humility."'"[98]

The voice recommending humility and the angel's advice in our first selection from Saint Antony's sayings brings us to the second half of that passage's message: God comes to meet us in the middle of our ordinary lives, in and through the humble fulfillment of the tasks set before us.

Our own century is in love with the extraordinary, whether the sudden and miraculous in the religious sphere or the cult of originality, "creativity," in the secular. Some years ago the *New Yorker* printed a cartoon showing two counters in the toy section of a department store. The first counter advertised "Toys for gifted children" and the second "For the average child." As to be expected, it is the former that is being mobbed while the saleswoman at the second is inspecting her nails, bored and quite undisturbed. This is not the way of the scriptural and monastic tradition. Moses is herding sheep when he comes upon the burning bush, Amos tending an orchard when he is called, and the Virgin is quietly at home when Gabriel appears to her. The Lord Jesus works as a carpenter and draws his disciples from fishermen and tax collectors. It is precisely the ordinary, the humdrum, that is called to become the vehicle of God's presence, to be transfigured. The Presence flames in a desert shrub; the uncreated light streams from the Carpenter's face, and a fisherman announces the beginning of the age to come.

For transfiguration *does* occur, and the ordinary does become theophany. Antony labors in humility, works, prays, reflects on the Scriptures, but it is an angel who visits him in the middle of boredom's trials, a Voice that calls him to humility, and, when he comes across a difficult passage in the scriptures, he gets help: "The brethren came to Abba Antony and laid before him a passage from *Leviticus*. The old man went out in the desert, secretly followed by Abba Ammonas, who knew that this was his custom. Abba Antony went a long way off and stood there praying, crying in a loud voice, 'God, send Moses to make me understand this saying.' Then there came a voice speaking with him... "

Angels? Voices? Moses himself as instructor? Are we not back to Father Festugière's "puerile credulity"? That depends on what we understand by "puerile," childish faith or the faith of a child. It seems clear to us, as to the subsequent tradition of the Church, that Antony's is the faith of which Christ spoke: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."[100] The whole struggle of monastic—of Christian—life is to become a wise child. Freed of ego's illusions through humility, and thus armed with the knowledge of our ignorance

and powerlessness, our eyes may open to the vision of glory, to Pentecost. So, while "leading ascetics... could certainly be reticent about visionary experience... this was because of their caution and humility,"[101] since "it was undoubtedly sought after"[102] and more, obtained. Just as Antony gets Moses to help him read the Pentateuch, so they used to say of Abba Pambo that it was his "custom not to speak readily till God inspires him."[103] It goes further, too, than "simply" conversation: "Some say of Antony that he was 'spirit-borne' (πνευματοφόρος), that is, carried along by the Holy Spirit."[104] If Antony lived in the presence of the Holy Spirit, it is related of other fathers of the desert that they were clothed in His glory: "The Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, 'Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?' Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, 'If you will, you can become all flame.'"[105]

Abba Joseph's revelation is one with the scriptures. The "glory of God" leads Israel in the wilderness,[106] is reflected on Moses' face,[107] fills the temple at Solomon's dedication,[108] is seen present in the sanctuary by Isaiah[109] and departing it by Ezekiel,[110] and is promised the righteous in the last days by Daniel.[111] It is the self-same glory that Christ promises His disciples in the text beginning this section. Saint Paul speaks of it expressly in the passage we cited some time before from 2 Cor. 3: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed..." This glory is not a metaphor, but *the* Christian experience. Its appearance in the case of Abba Joseph is far from unique in the original collection of sayings. We also find it mentioned in connection with Arsenius,[112] Pambo,[113] Silvanus,[114] and Sisoes. Compare the account of the latter's death with the passing of Father Augustine the Russian in our "Contemporary Paterikon" below:

> (*Abba Sisoes*) His countenance suddenly became like the sun and they were all filled with fear... then there was as a flash of lightning and all the house was filled with a sweet odor.[115]

(*Father Augustine, +1965*) When Father Augustine finally passed away, his face suddenly lit up, blindingly, three times.

The humble little Russian monk of our own time dies in the same light and fragrance as the great ascetic of old. Abba Joseph's testimony is also repeated in our "Paterikon," and the tradition of the "glory" is expanded upon below in Father Aemilianos's address on "The Transfiguration." We will not burden the reader with further examples, save to note that this experience is one with a continuous record in the Tradition, from Old Testament to New, from ancient days down through "the saints who, in every generation, have been well-pleasing to God."[116]

From the monks, then, have come proofs, proofs rich and without break, of the power of Christ in His Spirit at work in the Church. From the monks, too, we have that enormous body of works, only partially represented in the *Philokalia*, analyzing the motions of the human heart and the ways of the Spirit's charismata active within it. Their analysis, moreover, never comes as the product of an abstract or academic application of theory, but directly out of "theory" in its proper, Christian sense, *theoria* as spiritual vision or contemplation, as the fruit of an experience that is lived, conscious, and transfiguring. In short, as "charismatic," monasticism has been the source of a constant stream of saints, a river of them. They fill up, second only to the martyrs, the Orthodox calendar. They are the martyrs' successors—though we might note that the Orthodox Church has known more martyrs in this century than in all previous eras combined—and they are such because they fulfill the same function. All of God's holy ones, the saints, are such because they are the continuing proof of the Resurrection, of what Christ's death and rising have given us: Pentecost, the Spirit Who transfigures and makes new, Who is the arrival and very substance of God's Kingdom.

Concluding Remarks: Monks, Athos, and America Today

To ask "why monks?" is much the same as to ask "why Christians?" Monasticism is nothing more, nor less, than Christianity. It does not, certainly, claim to exclude other expressions of Christian life. Marriage is blessed, is itself an ascetic way, and all Christians are called to reveal God's Kingdom in the daily round of their lives. Yet the monks have, as we have tried to show, provided us with perhaps the single most sustained and successful attempt to live an integral Christian life, one in accord with the Gospel and revealing the fruits of the Spirit. There can really be no arguing with that success. It not only fills our Church calendars, but has most profoundly affected our worship, theology, and our understanding of prayer. Indeed, it can fairly be said that Orthodox "spirituality"—as much as we can admit that term and concept—is monastic. That this is the case does not lie in some sort of monkish plot or tyranny—not unless we were to accept the jaundiced views of a Gibbon or the rarefied and abstracted understanding of Christianity's essence put forward by a Harnack—but because, simply, the monastic way is a "proven commodity." It has worked. From the monks' beginnings the Church recognized that fact and ever afterwards, with a few exceptions on the part of bishops (most of them in our own times), she has cherished and sustained them. Christian people recognized it even before most of the Church leaders. People flocked to Antony as later they would flock to the elders in Scete, the ascetics in Palestine, to Symeon Stylites and Daniel on their pillars, to Sergius of Radonezh and Seraphim of Sarov in the Russian forests, to Herman on his island, to Silouan and Joseph on Athos, to Father Cleopas in Rumanian Moldavia and the late Father Philotheos (Zervakos) at the monastery of Longovarda on Paros.[117]

The last three names are significant. People *still* flock to elders of known sanctity. Monasticism not only worked, but it still works. Now, at last, we return to the reasons for this book. The texts that follow this introduction were written and assembled by men who are not refugees from the fourth century. Neither are they simply caretakers for what

the worldly would see as an enormous, outdoor museum of Byzantine antiquities, a sort of medieval Williamsburg. Whoever mistakes them for such, or who chooses to do so, will have missed the point, and the point is nothing less than the Gospel.

These are strong words. A modern Roman Catholic priest points respectfully to the "religious attitudes" evident in the early monastic fathers and observes that they must "appear very remote to the majority of readers." He warns his reader not to try reconstructing them. "Let us avoid revivals! All of them."[118] Perhaps in the case of the modern Roman Catholic church where, as Father Placide writes at length below, the tradition has taken a different turn ever since the early middle ages, this advice makes a kind of sense. Historical reconstructions are inevitably artificial, strained, and at the last, false. Let our own liturgical reformers take warning from what has occurred in, again, Roman Catholicism merely in the past thirty years. But, in the case of the Orthodox, there is no question whatever of any kind of reconstruction. What need have we of reconstructing something that lives and flowers in front of our eyes? "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," goes the American proverb, and in the contemporary Athonites we find that the ancient line of the first monks carries on. Let someone go to Athos today, or read what follows, and he will hear the same accents, the same tones, will find the same experiences recounted as in Antony's *Life* and the *Sayings of the Fathers*. There has never been any break in this continuity. The "golden chain" of the saints stretches back unbroken to Antony and, before him, to Pentecost and the Lord Jesus.

Someone may think that it is all well and good to speak of Athos, but what of the Orthodox Church here in America? Five thousand miles is a long way to go, so even if the Tradition flourishes on the Holy Mountain or in Rumania, this does not help us much in North America where there are no monks or monasteries worth the mention. First of all, we would reply that it is not altogether true that "the Orthodox have arrived in [America] without the monks,"[119] nor secondly, should we in consequence feel obliged to wait for the Church to "give birth to a lay movement which reaffirms [in substituting for it] the truths of the

faith... which monasticism has represented... "[120] The Church came to the Americas, in her fullness, with the monks in 1794. Monks are still present here, and monasteries, though they are far fewer than they should be and, worse, are almost entirely marginalized. Worse yet, as Dr. Guroian (whose words just now we quoted rather unfairly out of context) observes so pointedly, "there is no *symphonia* with the prevailing culture," "no easy correlation" with the American way.[121] Worst of all, as third and fourth and fifth generations have grown up and the link with the old countries has become less than memory, the Church is simply assimilated to the American pattern in the same way as any of the other "denominations." While this is not unfamiliar territory for anyone who has read the works of the late Fathers Alexander Schmemann[122] or John Meyendorff,[123] we should like here simply to emphasize the fact, too little preached in our parishes, that the Orthodox Church can never, barring a radical and entirely unforeseeable change in the surrounding culture, be anything other than an "immigrant church." It can never be anything but an alien, a pilgrim community, in the America of the twenty-first century.

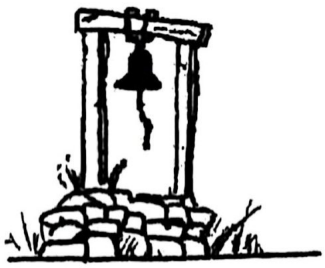
Is this a new thing? Not at all, not even for Americans. Pilgrims are at the root of our surrounding culture, after all, and in much the same way, so Father Placide argues below in "Mount Athos and Europe," as monasticism lies behind modern Western Europe. But, just as today's France or Germany is a long way from Charlemagne's, so we, the United States, have come a long way from Cotton Mather and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The originally evangelical Christian elements in our American nationalism—or messianism[124]—have been allowed to fall away in recent years. Increasingly we are left with, or rather, our media provide us with a strange kind of civic faith that preaches peace on earth, good will among differing "lifestyles," and confidence in our powers to solve, scientifically and democratically, whatever present difficulties we may find ourselves in as a result of our immediate past confidence in those same abilities. We are given new icons, Mr. Turner and Ms. Fonda, Mr. Schwarzenegger, the passing princes of pop, and, of course, the late great King Elvis. We are encouraged to a new ascesis:

no tobacco, no wine, safe sex, environmental awareness, sensitivity, etc., etc. All, or much of this, finds its way inevitably and often quite uncritically into our churches. And all of it, at least in its governing rationale, is false. Not that it is not a good thing to watch what we consume, or that we should not be kind to others or mindful of natural beauty, but the spirit that moves these things in our present society is manifestly not the Holy Spirit of the Gospels. We fast now in order to lose weight, to be more desirable, or to prolong our body's life, but not for God's sake, not to pray, not for our body to be transfigured. We are "sensitive" because all ways of life, lifestyles, are fundamentally equal (except the outright criminal, and even then...), and not because we would have the merciful God moving and acting within and through us. We respect nature because, as Dr. Carl Sagan remarked on national television, "The cosmos is all," or because we are all part of mother earth, "Gaia," and not because we are the stewards and, in Christ, once again the anointed viceroys of God's creation.

The monks of Athos remind us of our nature and calling as Christians. They remind us of the fact of the Church, the new creation, called out of the world to be the world's salvation. The monks have always been, and will continue to be, the Church's "catholic conscience," the witness to her universal calling. All of us here in America, the Orthodox Church and America itself, stand in great need of that witness—at least if we, Orthodox, are ever to be more than a benign association of ethnic societies. The scandal of ascetic withdrawal is needed to break the icons of our contemporary culture as it did those of the ancient world, and the ascetic ordeal is required to replace our world's false ascesis. We need the witness of the prophet, the gospel that the charismatic brings us by virtue of his very person. We need saints, men and women like the fathers whom the reader will meet in the texts that follow. They are as necessary to us now, at the close of the twentieth century, as they were at the beginning of the fourth. If nothing else, we hope that this book will move the reader to visit some of our monasteries here in America, or go on pilgrimage to Athos, or read further in the Scriptures and Fathers, and, above all, pray that God may prosper what monks we do have and

raise up more to follow them. We can be sure that our Orthodoxy will be without "salt" unless He does, and unless we desire and pray for it.

Feast of the Archangels
Marquette University
1991



Part One

On the Way to the Holy Mountain

> I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.
>
> —*Psalm* 122

IN THIS OPENING SECTION we have the pleasure of introducing Archimandrite Placide (Deseille) to the American reader. Father Placide has been a well-known figure in both Roman Catholic, and, more recently, Orthodox circles in France and Western Europe for many years. He is the author of many translations of patristic texts, as well as books and articles on the origins and spirit of monasticism. It was the great privilege of this writer to have been present at Father Placide's reception into the Orthodox Church in June, 1977, and, throughout the following year, to have profited from his acquaintance and conversation during our shared "novitiate" at the monastery of Simonos Petros. In providing this translation, we hope to offer some return on the gift of that acquaintanceship.

By placing this article at our book's beginning we are seeking to introduce the reader to Mount Athos and Orthodox monasticism by means of the life pilgrimage of a distinguished western scholar, a journey that concluded with his acceptance of tonsure at an Athonite monastery. Here is a man, fully our contemporary and steeped in the best of Western culture and religious tradition, who found on the Holy Mountain something that was not foreign, antiquated, or merely irrelevant. He discovered instead the roots, alive and still vigorous, of his own European tradition. He is not, as he explains below, an "orientalist," nor has he become one, nor ever felt the need to adopt an "eastern" mind. Athos, as Father Placide discovers, is his own native land—so far, of

course, as a Christian may say that of any place on this earth. What he then goes on to say in "Mount Athos and Europe," the little article appended to his spiritual autobiography, we may take as also applying to us who live in North America. The same Spirit Who lives and moves on Athos, the same way of life in all essentials, was that which the early monks of Western Europe knew and lived. If the monks made Europe, and Europe in turn created the United States and the other nations of the Americas, then Athos is our home as well, our own roots as Americans. We wish the reader who travels with Father Placide a *bon voyage*, and a happy homecoming.

1

Stages of a Pilgrimage

by Archimandrite Placide (Deseille)

EARLY FORMATION

I REMEMBER EVERYONE who contributed to my human and spiritual education with profound gratitude. Beginning with my family, I was shaped in the school of the Church's great liturgical and patristic tradition. My grandmother and my two paternal aunts, who influenced me greatly, had as their bedside reading Dom Cabrol's *Book of Ancient Prayer,* and Dom Gueranger's *Liturgical Year,* books which contained a great many splendid texts from the ancient liturgies of West and East.

These three women were animated by a lively faith and deep piety, and had a horror of sentimental devotions. From very early on they knew how to give me a feeling and taste for the wealth of the Tradition. They also loved the monastic life, the works of Dom Marmion, and the great abbeys of Beuron, Maredsous, and Solemnes[1] were the high places of their Christianity. At the high school, my Jesuit teachers—men of prayer and intelligence, of a great nobility of heart—awakened in me a love for classical antiquity, for the chivalry of the Middle Ages, and for the seventeenth century in France as well. But in no way did they oppose the influence of my family.

I must have been twelve years old when I read, in a magazine already quite old, an article on the monasteries of Meteora in Thessaly, illustrated with evocative photographs. It left me with a deep impression, and I sensed that in those regions there existed a tradition still more venerable, still more authentic than the great, contemporary Benedictine abbeys which my grandmother was always talking to me about. I would have loved to become a monk at Great Meteora—but, obviously, that was an impossible hope. I could not even conceive of my one day

being accepted into a Catholic monastery, so much did the way of life which they led there seem to me sublime and inaccessible. I looked forward to another future.

The war of 1939 and the German occupation harshly altered the whole tenor of my life. I had the opportunity to go often to the Abbey of Wisques, in the Pas-de-Calais. There I became acquainted with a wonderful monk, Dom Pierre Doyère, a former naval officer who had entered this monastery and later become its prior. I always remained very fond of him, as well as of the Father Abbot, Dom Augustin Savaton. Fifteen years later I was obliged to collaborate with Dom Doyère in the edition, for the series *Sources Chrétiennes*, of the works of Saint Gertrude d'Helfta, a great Benedictine mystic of the fourteenth century.

The figure of Saint Francis of Assisi and his earliest companions, which I discovered through the works of Joergensen[2] and the *Fioretti*,[3] thrilled me, but later franciscanism held no attraction. I visited some Benedictine abbeys, Solemnes in particular. The latter I often came back to, and it remained for me, alongside the Grande Trappe, as a kind of second spiritual fatherland. Benedictine life, however, although it attracted me because it was rooted in tradition, still did not satisfy in me a certain need for the absolute, a taste for a kind of roughness in existence and a gospel primitivism, qualities I found symbolized by the franciscan hermitages of Umbria and the monasteries of Meteora.

LIFE AS A CISTERCIAN (1942–1966)

In July, 1942, providential circumstances led me to make a brief visit to the Cistercian Abbey of Bellefontaine, in Anjou.[4] Breaking rather oddly with his custom of putting vocations to a long test, the Abbot asked me very bluntly: "When do you want to enter?" I was received as a postulant the following September, at the age of sixteen. The Cistercian Trappists followed the rule of Saint Benedict, like the Benedictines, but their life had the stamp of a more pronounced simplicity and austerity. Among the Trappists I felt myself closer to the living sources of monasticism, closer to the Gospel as the Desert Fathers had wished to live it.

The monastery's abbot, Dom Gabriel Sortais, was a man of great faith and prayer. Had he not one day stopped a fire by throwing his rosary into the burning building? Good and full of energy, rigorous in his personal asceticism and knowing how to show himself as demanding with regard to others, he applied to himself the example of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and was "father and mother" for his monks. I do not think that he read very much in the Fathers of the Church. But he was very attached to the monastic tradition, and through his observance and concrete practice of the Rule he joined with the spirit of the ancient Fathers.

IN THE SCHOOL OF THE CHURCH FATHERS AND THE SPIRITUAL TRADITION

For my formation the Abbot gave me to the care of the Master of Novices, Father Emile, a young monk who was imbued with the teaching of Saint John Cassian and taught his novices the meaning of the Rule of Saint Benedict by commenting on it in relation to its sources, the Desert Fathers, Saint Pachomius, and Saint Basil the Great. Somewhat later I was obliged to read the writings of Saint Dorotheos of Gaza and Saint John of the Ladder, both of whom had been, for the Abbot de Ranee, the great reformer of the [monastery of] Trappe in the seventeenth century, the principle sources of inspiration at the time of his conversion. During my years of formation, I kept assiduous company with the Cistercian authors of the twelfth century, who had harmoniously combined the Augustinian spiritual tradition with an Origenism that had been purified and distilled by Saints Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. But I also loved the teachings of Saint John of the Cross,[5] and of the French school of the seventeenth century, where one can find something of the living breath of the Church Fathers, and authors such as Fathers Lallement and Surin, practical and lucid guides for whomever wanted to progress in the spiritual life.[6]

This monastic formation continued under the guidance of my spiritual father, Father Alphonse, a fervent monk, full of humor and on occasion something of a "fool for Christ." It was also at the monastery

that I did my theological studies. For several years I studied the works of Thomas Aquinas in a quite thorough way. I liked Thomistic philosophy very much. I found in it an excellent antidote to the poisons of individualism, subjectivism, and idealism that have infected modern thought. But the manner in which Thomas Aquinas conceived the relations between nature and grace, and the use he made of reason—even if dependent on the Faith—to construct a theology answering to the Aristotelian definition of "science" troubled me. It was profoundly different from the Fathers' approach to theology. I had no trouble in admiring the coherence and harmony of Thomism's theological synthesis, but for me it recalled the gothic architecture of Thomas's era: quite brilliant, but where reason is too rigorous in forcing the materials to submit to its demands. By its nature, the Scholastic method seemed to me open to reducing the mysteries of God to what reason can grasp of them, hemming them in with its definitions, or enclosing them in syllogisms. The writings of the Fathers, on the other hand, breathed a sense of the sacred and of the mystery, evoked a reciprocal penetration of the human and divine, and found their corresponding school of plastic arts in the art of the Romanesque and of Byzantium.

This attachment to the Fathers brought me occasional disappointments. A little before my ordination to the priesthood, the Abbot advised me to read a good treatise on the priesthood. I replied that I would like to read some work of the Fathers on the subject. He answered sharply: "But you're simply not thinking! You're going to be ordained in three weeks: right now you have to read something serious on the priesthood. The Fathers! You'll have plenty of time to read the Fathers later, as an addition." And I was obliged to read a pious work of the nineteenth century, as sentimental in its effusions as it was rationalizing in its theology. I often met with similar reactions. Another superior of a monastery whom I had been speaking with about the Fathers answered me with: "Yes, certainly, there are lovely things in the Fathers. But they neither have any theology nor mysticism. There was no real theology in the Church before Saint Thomas. And, if there were great ascetics in the East, there were still no mystics. In the Church, mysticism begins

with Saint Bernard and does not arrive at maturity until Saint John of the Cross, in the sixteenth century." These two observations deserve to be cited, because they illustrate a state of mind that I often collided with. One would willingly admit that the Fathers are very interesting, that they remain precious sources, but the same person would be unable to find in them any matured teaching. According to this view, the Fathers' thought was still sketchy. Between them and the great classics of Roman Catholicism, the latter all being after the twelfth century, there was all the difference that separates the child and the adolescent from the adult.

It was impossible for me to share in this way of seeing things. To be sure, I admired Thomas Aquinas, and I hoped that, by not interpreting him through his later commentators but by reading him with respect to his patristic sources, it would be possible to reduce the differences that separated him from the teaching of the Fathers. But I had the inner conviction that it was the latter who were the privileged witnesses to the tradition of the Church, and that one would find its fullness in them. With them, every aspect of doctrine and of Christian life was always explained in the light of the central mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the deification of man through the redeeming Incarnation of Christ. With them, knowledge always proceeded from the fullness of life and spiritual experience. Quoting a formula whose author I have forgotten and which I cite from memory: "They do not teach by way of deduction or conjecture; they speak to us about a country where they have gone themselves."

That which interested me about the Fathers was not, moreover, whatever was most individual or original in their thought; to the contrary, it was the convergences, everything that witnessed to the tradition of the Church that each of them had received and personally assumed. I was enchanted by the criterion of Saint Vincent of Lérins: "One must take the greatest care to hold as true that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all." It is in the assembly of the Church, unanimous in love throughout time and space, that the Holy Spirit manifests the fullness of truth. The liturgy, too, filled me to overflowing, because it was not the prayer of an individual or a particular group; it did not

bear the marks of any one place or of any specific period: born in the age of the Fathers, it had developed while passing through the filter of generations of believers at prayer, and what remained was authentically of the Church.

I was thoroughly happy at the monastery. I felt intimately in harmony with the liturgical life and the whole range of observances. Bellefontaine, moreover, was a monastery where great fidelity to the Rule was allied with a spirit of freedom and relative flexibility. The Abbot was quite free of fussiness. The one thing that troubled me was a certain discontinuity between, on the one hand, our observance of the Rule and the liturgy, and, on the other, our theology and spirituality. While the former had stayed the same as they had been during the first eleven centuries of the Church, the latter, to the contrary, had become, for many monks, marked by modern Catholicism. I remember saying one day, and this was not simply a witticism: "Our Rule and liturgy are patristic, our theology Dominican, and our spirituality Jesuit or Carmelite!" The problem was quite similar to what I would later encounter among the Uniate Churches: one is in the presence of a venerable tradition, but a tradition that has been torn from its original climate and which many follow only out of obedience, without having a deep "feeling" for its meaning. It seemed to me necessary to reconstruct the unity of our life by returning to the teaching and mind of the Fathers. And I had a presentiment that the Orthodox Church had kept this great tradition of the first Christian centuries more faithfully.

FIRST MEETING WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCH: THE INSTITUTE OF ST. SERGIUS

I was ordained priest in 1952. A little while later, I was named a professor of dogmatic theology, and, a little after, was made responsible at the same time for the spiritual formation of the young monks of the monastery who were studying in preparation for the priesthood. Concerned that I provide theological instruction in accord with the mind of the Fathers, I took advantage of several trips to Paris, on behalf of monastery business, to meet with Father Cyprian Kern, professor of patristics

at the Institute of Saint Sergius, and with Vladimir Lossky, whose *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* had filled me with enthusiasm (in spite of the express warnings of that excellent Jesuit who had had the imprudence to make me a present of this explosive book). It happened, alas! that Lossky chanced to die shortly after our meeting.

Father Cyprian initiated me into the doctrine of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, of Saint Maximus the Confessor, and of Saint Gregory Palamas. He showed me, over the course of long conversations and with unlimited kindness, how the Christology of the Council of Chalcedon and the Palamite doctrine of the divine energies are the keys to the Orthodox understanding of the Church, of man, and of the universe. However, very careful and respectful of the conscience of the other, Father Cyprian never suggested that I enter the Orthodox Church. At that period, moreover, the idea would not have taken root in me. My belonging to the Catholic Church seemed to me to be self-evident and unquestionable. My concern was to find in the Orthodox tradition some help for better penetrating the meaning of my own tradition.

I loved the Latin liturgy deeply. Knowledge of the Orthodox liturgy, which I had just discovered with amazement at Saint Sergius, made me the more sharply aware of the analogous wealth, albeit more hidden, concealed in the traditional Latin liturgy, and stirred me to live in it more intensely. The liturgy of the Trappists was at that time, in spite of some later additions that were easily discernible and did not detract from the whole, identical with the liturgy which the West had been celebrating in the era before it had broken communion with the East. In contrast to the Byzantine liturgy, it was composed almost exclusively of biblical texts, which could seem initially very dry, but these texts had been very skillfully chosen. The unfolding of the liturgical year was perfectly harmonious and the rites, in spite of their sobriety, were charged with a great wealth of meaning. If one took the trouble, outside of the services, during the hours of that *lectio divina* so characteristic of the earlier monastic spirituality of the West, to take to heart a knowledge of the Bible and the interpretations that the Fathers had given it, the

celebration of the divine office took on, with God's grace, a wonderful sweetness.

PUBLICATIONS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

In 1958, I was sent to Rome to do higher studies in theology. For me, this was an opportunity to assemble, while frequenting the libraries, abundant documentation for the subjects that were close to my heart, and to bathe myself in the atmosphere of the ancient Rome of the catacombs and basilicas. Going often to ancient Ostia, to the lower levels of the basilicas of Saint Clement, of Saints John and Paul or of Saint Cecile, the daily sight of the Coliseum and the Circus Maximus, were a vivifying immersion in that ancient Christianity of our roots.

During this period I was associated with the secretariat of the series, *Sources chrétiennes,* in order to organize a series of volumes dedicated to medieval monastic texts. To be honest, the Abbot General of the Cistercian Order—the former Abbot of Bellefontaine, Dom Gabriel Sortais, who had at the time been promoted to this responsibility—had only asked me to create a collection of Cistercian texts of the twelfth century. However, it seemed to me desirable not to isolate these texts from the rest of the monastic and patristic tradition. I wanted to avoid giving the impression that there was a "Cistercian spirituality," in the modern sense of the word, in the same way that there is an Ignatian or Carmelite spirituality. It was the gift of monasticism to explode such specializations. Throughout the history of monasticism there have been different lines of spiritual Fathers and disciples and, while one may find varying dosages of the different elements constitutive of monasticism according to times and places, the monastic life is fundamentally one. This derives precisely from its patristic character. Diverse spiritualities are born later, only in the West.

I easily obtained the agreement of the Father General that the project be enlarged in this way. On my return to France this task of editing was thus added to my teaching of theology. They also asked me to give spiritual retreats in several monasteries and submit articles to various journals and encyclopedic dictionaries [e.g. the *Dictionary of*

Spirituality— ED.]. They conferred on me the editing of the project of a "Spiritual Directory," a sort of manual of spirituality for the use of the Cistercian order. Some judged the result of my efforts too influenced by the doctrine of the Desert Fathers and the Greek patristic tradition to represent truly what they had meant by "Cistercian spirituality." The project of an official manual was, moreover, finally abandoned: divergent tendencies within the Order were already beginning to surface. These "Principles of Monastic Spirituality" (1962), at first simply mimeographed, became later, revised and complete, *L'Échelle de Jacob* (1974) [*Jacob's Ladder*—unfortunately not yet in English translation—ED.].

In order to return to the sources of monasticism and the spiritual life, I hoped that a collection of ancient and eastern monastic texts could be undertaken in parallel with the series of western monastic texts of *Sources chrétiennes*, but with less in the way of scholarly apparatus, in order to encourage its diffusion. This project did not result in anything until 1966 with the publication of the first volume of the series, "Eastern Spirituality," devoted to the sayings of the Desert Fathers. I had then already left Bellefontaine for Aubazine, but was able in any case to remain editor of the collection right up to my entry into the Orthodox Church.

TRIP TO EGYPT

In 1960, at the invitation of his Grace, Elias Zoghby, at that time patriarchal vicar for the Greek Catholics in Egypt, I went on a trip to that country in order to make contact with Coptic monasticism. During this time, I stayed at the monastery of Deir Suriani in Wadi Natroun, the ancient desert of Scete, and did no more than visit the other monasteries. I felt it an inestimable grace, this pilgrimage in the places that were during the fourth century the most radiant center of monastic life, to the point that Abba Arsenius could say that Scete was to the monks what Rome was to the world. The monasticism of Scete has always had a great attraction for me. Without doubt, it is with the Sayings of the Desert Fathers that I have always felt myself to be most intimately in accord.

The desert of Scete is a vast plain of sand, lightly dimpled with valleys and sprinkled with rare tufts of hardy grass, which extends to the south of the highway linking Cairo to Alexandria. The four present monasteries, Saint Makarios, Deir Baramous, Amba Bishoi, and Deir Suriani (an extension of the former), occupy the place of three of the most ancient monastic centers of this desert. They appear as long, rectangular fortresses surrounded by high walls, with the domes of the churches and the massive outline of the keeps peering over the top, refuges against the desert bandits who, on several occasions, had massacred the monks. Built over springs of water, they appear on the inside of their enclosures like paradisiacal oases, in sharp contrast to the immense desolation that encircles them on all sides. At the period when I visited them, Coptic monasticism was enjoying a remarkable revival, one that has not yet begun to slow down.

At the origins of this renewal was a monk, named Abdel Messieh (servant of Christ), who had been living in a cave since 1935. The Pope of Alexandria in office in 1960, Kirillos VI, himself a former anchorite, had been profoundly influenced by this monk and was encouraging the monastic resurgence. At Deir Suriani, a few oldsters continued to lead an idiorhythmic life in the monastery, but all the young monks, the majority of whom came from a university environment, were leading a strictly cenobitic life, with the exception of one or another living at some distance away in the desert and coming back only at regular intervals to the monastery. Their day began with an hour's rule of prayer in their cells, followed by a long morning office in the church and the Liturgy. During the day, the monks divided up among themselves the different tasks in the monastery: gardening, printing, translating the texts of the Fathers into Arabic. The practice of the Jesus prayer was familiar to them. For me, this was the first discovery of a way of life that I would discover later, in almost identical form, on Mount Athos. I was as well greatly impressed by my meeting with Father Matta el Meskine (Matthew the Poor), who at the time was leading a semi-eremetical life at Helouan together with some disciples.

BIBLICAL, LITURGICAL, AND PATRISTIC RENEWAL IN THE ROMAN CHURCH

During the period which extends from the Second World War to the Second Vatican Council, a vigorous biblical, liturgical, and patristic renewal became discernable in the Roman Church under the influence of men like Father de Lubac,[7] Father Daniélou,[8] Dom Odo Casel,[9] of journals such as *Dieu Vivant*[10] and *La Maison-Dieu*, of publications like *Sources chrétiennes*.[11] I looked forward to a great deal from these efforts. Two things, however, gave me pause. On the one hand, it was clear that interest in this movement was quite limited; it scarcely reached the majority of the French diocesan clergy. On the other hand, a very considerable portion of the Roman Church's living strength was involved in the movements belonging to *Action Catholique*[12] and in pastoral experiments of the kind that gave us worker priests.[13] I felt a real sympathy for this abundance of effort and for the undeniably apostolic fervor to which they gave expression. At the same time, however, I felt that, in spite of partial convergences, they came out of a very different climate than biblical and patristic renewal. *Action Catholique* implied, in its praxis, an ecclesiology that was no longer, to be sure, that of the Counter Reformation,[14] but which nonetheless was not that of the Early Church either. One could also perceive in this movement a drift towards forms of liturgical celebration that were quite alien to the spirit of the traditional liturgies. In all this I sensed a new manifestation of modern Catholicism rather than a living return to the sources, which latter would have required a radical rethinking of the whole question.

I had not realized clearly enough that this second new trend was much more representative than the first of the inner logic of modern Catholicism, and that it was therefore likely to finish by neutralizing and supplanting the other tendencies. I was hoping that the dry bones were going to come to life again, and that all that the Roman Church had kept of the traditional elements in her institutions and her liturgy was going to become once again an invigorating and digestible food for modern man. I was hoping that, somehow, the Catholicism of the Counter Reform, in all the ways that it had become foreign to the great tradition

of the Church, would give way to a resurrection of the "Western Orthodoxy" of the first Christian centuries by virtue of the combination of the ancient heritage, rediscovered, with the lively forces of today.

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

In this frame of mind I welcomed with great joy the announcement of the Second Vatican Council. Little by little, however, I became aware of all that was ambiguous in the flow of ideas that were arising in the course of the conciliar debates, and whose repercussions were being felt even as far as our monastery. The Abbot General, who was perhaps more sensitive to the way in which authority was being undermined than to distortions of the Tradition, said to me one day: "I am very worried about the way the council is doing its work. If things go on in this way, the Church will be faced with one of the worst crises in her history."

Hope gradually faded that there would be a renewal of the structures and observances of the Roman Church through a return to the spirit and doctrine of the Fathers. With the Council, it was in many respects just the opposite that emerged. The Council itself, though, was responsible only quite indirectly. It served rather as an indicator. Up to the Council a great portion of the ancient institutions, in particular the traditional liturgy of the West, had been able to continue in spite of numerous alterations because Catholicism, governed by a strong and universally respected central power, had held on to them by means of authority. But to a large extent the faithful, and even more so the clergy, had lost sight of their deeper meaning. With the Council the pressure of authority weakened, and it was only logical that what had lost its meaning should finally collapse, and that one should be led to a reconstruction on new foundations in conformity with what had become over several centuries—or became now—the spirit of Roman Catholicism.

THE MONASTERY AT AUBAZINE (1966–1977)

Origins of the Monastery's Foundation

During the years 1962–1965 the tendencies I have just referred to began to solidify. It became obvious that I could not think and live in

accordance with the principles that seemed to me to be true without creating tensions and pointless conflict in the very heart of the monastery. All the same, I was certain that the fullness of the truth belonged on the side of the Fathers and the Early Church, on the side of that Orthodoxy that I loved without yet realizing that it could be, purely and simply, the Church.

I asked myself then whether the presence of Christians in the heart of the Roman Catholic Church, practicing Eastern rites and living the same tradition as the Orthodox, could not be the leaven that would any day bring about the return of the whole body to the spirit of the Christianity of the Fathers. Uniatism had been conceived by Rome as a means to bring Orthodox Christians into union with Rome without requiring them to renounce their own traditions. The development of ecumenism in the Catholic world tended to make this point of view obsolete. But, could one not hope that the presence and witness of Catholics of the Eastern Rite would contribute to bringing the whole of the Roman Church back to the fullness of the tradition? The clear and courageous contributions of the Melkite bishops to the Council lent some substance to these hopes.

If this were the case, could not the adoption of the Byzantine rite become for Catholics of Western origin a means of living the fullness of the tradition, given the present situation of the Roman Church, at some remove from the futile conflict between defenders of an already modified tradition—that of the end of the Middle Ages and the Counter Reformation—and supporters of the post-conciliar changes?

What therefore prompted me to turn towards the Byzantine tradition had nothing to do with its "oriental" character. I have never felt myself to be an "oriental," nor wanted to become so. But, given the state of things, the practice of the Byzantine liturgy seemed to me to be the most suitable means for entering into the fullness of the patristic tradition in a way that would be neither scholarly nor intellectual, but living and concrete. The Byzantine liturgy has always appeared to me much less as an "eastern" liturgy than as the sole existing liturgical tradition concerning which one could say: "It has done nothing more

nor less than closely incorporate into liturgical life all the great theology elaborated by the Fathers and Councils before the ninth century. In it the Church, triumphant over heresies, sings her thanksgiving, the great doxology of the Trinitarian and Christological theology of Saint Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, and Saint Maximus the Confessor. Through it shines the spirituality of the great monastic movements, from the Desert Fathers, from Evagrius, Cassian, and the monks of Sinai, to those of Studion and, later, of Mount Athos... In it, in a word, the whole world, transfigured by the presence of divine glory, reveals itself in a truly eschatological dimension."[15]

The Monastery of the Transfiguration

It was in this spirit that, accompanied by another monk of Bellefontaine who had over several years undergone an interior evolution comparable to my own, that I began on September 14, 1966, the foundation of the Monastery of the Transfiguration at Aubazine in Correze. We were joined fairly soon by several others. We tried thus for more than ten years to live the liturgical and spiritual tradition of Orthodoxy while remaining in the Roman Catholic Church. The necessary authorizations were given us quite easily, both by our monastic superiors and by Rome. We were never given, however, any precise canonical status: there was no existing canonical framework for our center, and it was only the uncertainty of canon law during the post-conciliar period that made our enterprise possible.

We had at our disposal woodland of seven hectares on a hillside overlooking the whole region of Brive to the borders of Limousin, Quercy, and Perigord. Little by little, using our own resources, we built a wooden church, a community building comprising kitchen, refectory, library, and various essential offices, a building for our guests, a workshop, and separate cabins to serve as cells for the members of the community. Our way of life, however, was cenobitic: the services in the church, our meals, and all our resources were in common.

The novice master of a famous French monastery summed up his impressions after a stay at Aubazine: "I was quite attracted by many aspects of monastic life as led at Aubazine. Some quick impressions: solitude, rather harsh poverty, a great simplicity of life, a spirit of utmost freedom for each person with nevertheless a very high standard of discipline, the central place given to the spiritual and strongly personal relationship between the father of the community and the brothers, the relatively unstructured character of community life, or, in other words, the great "lightness" of the monastery as an institution, an obvious closeness to the original sources of monasticism and the great Eastern tradition." These remarks seem to me rather fairly to sum up what we were at least trying to accomplish.

Among the young men who joined us several appeared, after some experience, called to a more "classically" monastic life and have since become splendid monks in Cistercian and Benedictine abbeys, or with the Carthusians. Others, attracted by the eremetical aspect of our lives, found the element of community life which we tried to keep a stumbling block. I have, indeed, always felt the latter to be an indispensable safeguard against serious spiritual delusions. Nothing inclines us more to union with God than the renunciation of our own will and our individual fantasies. The hermit's life can only be safely led by monks who have already acquired great experience in the spiritual life. From this point of view, our living in separate cells, or "hermitages," was probably not a very good idea for beginners.

The Ecclesiological Problem

In itself the life we led at Aubazine fulfilled our hopes. Gradually, however, a problem came to light that we had not foreseen at the beginning. We had dealings both with Orthodox monasteries and with communities of the Eastern Rite in union with Rome. To the degree that we came to know both groups better, we could see to what extent the Uniate Churches had been cut off from their roots and their own tradition, and that their position in the Roman Catholic Church was no better than marginal. Even when the Uniates reproduced the outer forms of the

Orthodox liturgy and Orthodox monasticism as exactly as possible, the spirit that animated their attempts was altogether different.

Westerners who chose the Byzantine rite faced a particular danger, for, no longer regarding themselves as subject to the demands peculiar to the Latin tradition, they were also deprived of the safeguards that these provide without, at the same time, benefiting from those which membership in the Orthodox Church would have brought them. Consequently, there is a great risk of following only one's own, subjective ideas, neither Catholic nor Orthodox, under the cover of "easternism" and so leaving the field open for abuses and illusions.

On the other hand, the post-conciliar evolution of the Roman Church was continuing. I hesitate to speak of a "crisis"; in any case I thought it very doubtful that the survival or even the prosperity of the Roman Church in this world were seriously threatened. In many respects, it was quite probable that, in spite of an unavoidable reduction in numbers, her influence and that of the papacy would increase, especially in the field of ecumenical relations and world diplomacy. But there is no doubt that many aspects of the Catholic Church changed very much in the years following the Council. And there can be no doubt that the most symptomatic change is that which has taken place in her liturgy. As Father Joseph Gelineau, one of the men deeply involved in these reforms, wrote after Vatican II: "It is a different liturgy from the Mass. In plain language: the Roman rite, as we knew it, no longer exists. It has been done away with."[16]

These changes troubled many of the faithful because they were made so hastily. Nevertheless, as I now became aware, they were in a sense quite normal and in conformity with the inner logic of Catholicism. Moreover, they followed in the wake of other, sometimes more important mutations which had only gone unnoticed by their contemporaries because our rapid means of communication were not available in earlier centuries and the spread of information took much longer.

I was thus led to reflect on the religious history of the West, and especially on the profound changes that one sees in almost all areas between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. At that time the institutions of

the Church were altered (notably the understanding of the papacy with the Gregorian reform),* and so were the rites of the sacraments (the abandonment of baptism by immersion, of communion under both kinds, of the deprecative formula of absolution, etc.),** and doctrine (the introduction of the *filioque* in the Creed and the development of the scholastic method in theology). One may note simultaneously the appearance of a new religious art, naturalistic, which breaks with the

* Gregorian Reform: the reforms of the Roman Church in the Middle Ages, particularly associated with the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073–1085), which culminated in the papal theocracy of Innocent III (1198–1216) and did most to shape the Roman Catholic Church as it appeared on the eve of Vatican II. The first of the Reform popes is generally felt to have been Leo IX (1049–1054), monk of the great monastery of Cluny in France which supplied many of the early Reform popes, including Gregory VII, and perhaps the very blueprint itself of the reformed Church. It was surely not accidental that the Roman curial official responsible for anathematizing Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople in 1054—and thus providing historians with the conventional date for the schism—was Cardinal Humbert da Silva, a legate of Leo IX and a very articulate (not to say violent) advocate of the reforms. In the words of the historian, George Every, "The Reform is the schism," in *The Byzantine Patriarchate*, 451–1204, London 1962, p. 193.—ED.

**"Deprecative formula of absolution": the form still in use today in the Greek Church. As given in a *Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers*, Crestwood, N.Y., 1983, it reads as follows "My spiritual child, who has confessed to my humble person, I, humble and a sinner, have not power on earth to forgive sins, but God alone; but, through that divinely spoken word which came to the Apostles after the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, saying: 'Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained,' we are emboldened to say; Whatsoever thou hast said to humble person, and whatsoever thou hast failed to say, may God forgive thee in this world and in that which is to come" (p.55). Compare this with the form used in Russian churches, taken from the Catholic texts in the seventeenth century: "May our lord and God Jesus Christ, through the Grace and bounties of His love towards mankind, forgive thee my child (name), all thy transgressions. And I, unworthy Priest, through the power given unto me by Him, do forgive and absolve thee from all thy sins (+). In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. (Ibid., p.60). This is one of the many ways in which the Russian Church was influenced by Roman Catholic thought and practice between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The earlier text clearly emphasizes the role of the priest as acting on behalf of the Church and less as exercising a "power" in his own right or by virtue (meaning the special "character" or "imprint") of his ordination.—ED.

traditional canons of Christian art as elaborated over the course of the era of the Fathers.

This fact, moreover, is recognized by Catholic historians. As Father Yves Congar has written: "The great shift is located at the hinge of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But the shift takes place only in the West. Between the ends of the eleventh and thirteenth centuries everything changes. This did not affect the East where, in so many ways, Christian practices remain today as they were—and as they were with us—before the end of the eleventh century. The more one understands these things, the more this observation is confirmed; and it is a very serious matter since it points us back precisely to the moment when the schism became a fact which, up to now, has found no real cure. It is impossible that this coincidence should be purely accidental and external."[17] Still more recently, another historian has confirmed these views: "It is certainly not accidental that the break between Rome and Constantinople became definitive in 1054, at the very moment when, under the influence of the reform movement, the papacy and the Western Church had chosen to travel religious paths that were altogether new."[18]

For Father Congar, certainly, this mutation does not bear on the essentials of the faith. Nevertheless, it is a fact that both sides felt the divergences that had thus appeared between the two Churches necessarily entailed a break in communion. Thus there was schism, and even heresy, since dogmatic principles were affirmed on the one side and denied on the other. And history, so it seemed to me, made it quite clear that the initiative for the rupture had come from the Church of the West.

In order to justify her internal evolution the Roman Church appeals to the doctrine of the development of dogma, and to the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff. Seen this way, the various changes appear as stages in a legitimate process of growth, and the definition of new dogmas as a transition from the implicit to the explicit. The new forms are contained in the old as the oak tree is in the acorn. The sole definitive criterion permitting one to discern with certainty a legitimate development from a distortion or corruption of the Tradition communion with the Roman

Pontiff, and the guarantee of his doctrinal infallibility. The essential identity between the two successive stages of development can thus be affirmed, even if it should escape the observer, provided it be admitted by the pope.

It was thus that solely the doctrine of papal primacy and infallibility could reassure me of the identity of the present-day Roman Church with the Early Church, in spite of historical facts pointing to the contrary and what my own inner sense suggested to me concerning matters of the faith.

But on this point again, familiarity with the Fathers of the Church and the study of history exposed me to the fragility of the Roman position. Admittedly, the popes claimed a primacy of divine right from very early on, though without making a "dogma" of it as would later be the case. But this demand was never unanimously accepted in the Early Church. Quite the contrary, one can say that the present dogma of the Roman primacy and infallibility is opposed to the spirit and general practice of the Church during the first ten centuries. The same is true of other doctrinal differences, particularly the *filioque*, which appeared very early in the Latin Church, but which was never received by the rest of the Christian world as part of the deposit of faith (this is why its definition as dogma can only be considered by the Orthodox Church as an error in matters of faith).

I observed that the analysis of Catholic historians agreed, in great part, with that of Orthodox theologians, even if they did not draw identical conclusions from the facts—the former's main concern being often to discern in the distant past some faint indications of subsequent developments. Even so Mgr. Batiffol, for example, wrote concerning the idea of the Pope as successor of Saint Peter: "Saint Basil does not mention it, neither does Saint Gregory Nazianzus or Saint John Chrysostom. The authority of the bishop of Rome is one of the first importance, but in the East it was never seen as an authority by divine right."[19]

Concerning the infallibility of the Pope, Father F. W. De Vries, speaking of the formula, "Peter has spoken through Agathon!" which was used by the Fathers of the VIth Ecumenical Council, acknowledges

that: "This formula is nothing other than a solemn affirmation, made after a thorough examination of Agathon's letter, that Agathon (the pope at the time) was in accordance with the witness of Saint Peter. This exclamation in no way means that Agathon must be right since he possesses the authority of Peter... Another indication of the non-recognition by the Council of the absolute authority of the Pope in matters of doctrine is the very fact that Honorius—rightly or wrongly, it makes no difference—was condemned by the Council as a heretic, and that Pope Leo II made no objection to the fact that a Council had done so. The phrase of the *Codex juris canonici*: 'Prima sedes a nemine judicatur (The first See is judged by no one)' was not therefore, at that time, recognized in an absolute sense even in Rome. In any case, a similar condemnation of a Pope would be unthinkable today. One must thus admit that there has been an evolution."[20]

A Prophetic Experiment?

For several years I had been attracted by an argument supported by a number of Catholic ecumenists who were genuinely favorable towards Orthodoxy. If true, it would have made complete sense of what we were trying to live out at Aubazine.

According to these theologians, one of the most outstanding of whom was Louis Bouyer, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church had never, in spite of appearances, ceased to be one Church. They are two local Churches, or rather, two groups of local Churches, each fulfilling the fullness of the Church of Christ in a different though equivalent way. The quarrel between them is age-old and based on misunderstandings, but they are not really separate and have never ceased to comprise, together, the one, visible Church of Christ.

If we admit this argument, we can even go so far as to say that the Orthodox Church has preserved, better than the Catholic Church, certain aspects of the Church's original tradition, though the Roman Catholic Church has nevertheless neither given up nor altered anything essential, and, further, has developed other aspects of Christian life better than the Orthodox, such as missionary awareness and a sense

of universality, and has also known better how to adapt itself to the modern world. Their re-establishment of full communion, to which in theory there would be no impediment, would greatly enrich both Churches and, moreover, would allow the Roman Church to overcome her difficulties in the post-conciliar period.

An experiment such as we were conducting at Aubazine would as a consequence become of great interest and be clothed with, as it were, a prophetic significance. A good number of our Catholic friends, and perhaps certain of our Orthodox friends, had more or less consciously adopted this point of view, one which the mutual lifting of the anathemas of 1054 and the title of "sister churches," often used by Rome, seemed to justify.

Gradually, however, we realized, not without suffering and inner anguish, that this understanding was an illusion—a noble one, certainly, but one in contradiction with the fundamental principles of ecclesiology. It is impossible that two Churches not in sacramental communion for over a thousand years, and with one defining as dogmas what the other has rejected as contrary to the Apostolic Faith, should both be the Church of Christ. This would be to admit that the gates of hell had prevailed against her, that division had penetrated the Church herself. The Fathers would have been unanimous in rejecting such a doctrine. Furthermore, the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has for centuries appointed Catholic bishops, Uniate or Latin, to episcopal sees which already have an Orthodox incumbent is a clear sign of the nonidentity of the two Churches, even on a local level.

The Last Stages

It was only very gradually that I came to the conclusion that the Orthodox Church is the Church of Christ in her fullness, and that the Roman Catholic Church is a member separated from her. Such a trek would doubtless have been easier for younger men, or for men less integrated than I was into the Roman Church. For a Catholic of my generation, the idea of papal primacy was deeply rooted. Besides, in my earliest years at the Trappist monastery I had known the Latin tradition in one

of its purest forms, well-preserved until very recently. I had also known monks, nuns, and fervent Christians who had shone with a deep spiritual life. I was familiar with the lives of many Catholic saints; to me their sanctity seemed to be beyond doubt, and close to that of Orthodox saints. I was aware of and loved everything there was of authentic Christianity—which now I would tend to call genuine Orthodox survivals—among Roman Catholics.

Towards the end of 1976, however, my brothers at Aubazine and I were impressed with the certainty that we could no longer delay. We had to plan for our entry into the Orthodox Church. Should it be quickly, or should we await a more favorable opportunity? Some objections appeared. We were fairly well-known in the Catholic world. Our monastery had a modest but real influence. Would it not be preferable, for the time being, to remain among Roman Catholics, in order to help them in rediscovering their roots, in returning to the common sources of the two traditions? Would this not be more prudent, more in keeping with charity, more likely to further Christian unity? Besides, was this not the only way to safeguard the very existence of our monastery at Aubazine, and so continue the work we had already begun?

But how could we remain loyal members of the Catholic Church, and so continue to profess outwardly all her dogmas, when inwardly we were convinced that certain of these dogmas had departed from the Tradition of the Church? How could we continue to share in the same Eucharist while aware of our differences regarding the Faith? How could we remain outside the Orthodox Church, outside of which there could be no salvation and life in the Spirit for those who, having recognized her as the Church of Christ, refused to join her for human motives? To give in to considerations of ecumenical diplomacy, opportunity, and personal convenience would, in our case, have been to seek to please men rather than God, and to lie both to men and to God. Nothing could have justified such duplicity.

Where could we best be received into the Church? We knew that the situation of the Orthodox Church in France is a delicate one, that her bishops must take into account the overwhelming presence of the

Catholic majority and strive to keep their relationship with the Catholic hierarchy as amicable as possible. We were concerned that our reception into the Orthodox Church might arouse considerable opposition in some Catholic circles, and that this could only be harmful for the Orthodox Church in France. The events following our reception only proved that we were correct, indeed, even more so than we had thought. Several well-known Orthodox people whom we consulted at the time made no secret of the fact that it would, in fact, be expedient for us to be received outside of France.

In previous years we had made several journeys to Orthodox countries: Rumania, Serbia, Greece, and Mount Athos. At the time we had no thought of joining the Orthodox Church, but had wanted to acquire first-hand knowledge of Orthodoxy and become acquainted with her liturgical and monastic life. We had particularly liked Rumania, in which we had seen the combination of a lively monasticism, including some very remarkable spiritual personalities, and a population animated by a deep faith and piety. But now that the problem of our reception into the Church had arisen, we did not feel that the domestic situation in Rumania would allow us to set up a canonical bond between ourselves and this Church—which still remains very dear to us. Then a series of circumstances, in which we could not but see the hand of God, opened up for us the doors of the monastery of Simonos Petras on Mount Athos.

Once we had made our decision, I went, on April 2, 1977, to see the Catholic bishop of Tulle, Mgr. Brunon, who was responsible for us. Another member of our community accompanied me. The bishop listened to us at length, and with genuine kindness. He recognized that our decision had not been taken lightly, but had been reached after long years of prayer and reflection. He added that, from his point of view, we deserved neither blame nor reproach, but that we would have to act with prudence and discretion in order to avoid trouble and confusion for those around us. He even hoped that our step would be understood and accepted by Rome—a hope that events were quickly to dash. He, too, felt that it would be preferable for us to be received into the Orthodox

Church in Greece or on the Holy Mountain, rather than in France, in order not to create unnecessary problems.

At his request, we went shortly afterwards to Rome to speak with Cardinal Paul Phillipe, at that time Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches united with Rome. The Cardinal received us on April 14th. He was very kindly disposed toward us, but we saw immediately that the heart of the problem could not be reached with him. He told us: "As far as I am concerned, I believe that there is no real difference of faith between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. You may adopt the whole of Orthodox doctrine, the Orthodox liturgy, Orthodox spirituality, monasticism, and still be in union with Rome." He then assured us that he would help us in every possible way and give us every opportunity to pursue our experiment at Aubazine within the framework of the Catholic Church. But this was no longer the issue, and we could not commit ourselves to this path.

Subsequently, the bishop of Tulle adopted a much less conciliatory attitude toward us, and gave us notice to leave the premises at Aubazine which we had built with our own hands. He also took steps to make his wishes known to Catholic ecumenical organizations and to the Orthodox authorities.

During the same period we went to see the Father Abbot of Bellefontaine, who was still our canonical superior, in order to explain our decision to him. He was quite surprised at it, and told us clearly and frankly that he could only disapprove of it. But he added that he respected our conscience, refused to condemn us, and was anxious to maintain the most trusting and brotherly relations with us. He never did change his attitude, and was always honest and full of evangelical charity.

MOUNT ATHOS AND THE CHURCH IN FRANCE (SINCE 1978)

Mount Athos

We left shortly afterward for the Holy Mountain. Our acquaintance with the Orthodox Church and her monasticism was still superficial and inadequate. The opportunity of receiving within the monastery a

sound introduction to this way of life was an invaluable gift. Simonos Petras was remarkable as much for the spiritual personality of its abbot as for the youthfulness and spiritual vigor of its community. On several occasions Catholic monks had been received very hospitably as visitors, and the problems and realities of the West were at this monastery particularly well known and understood.

Our first stay at Athos dated back to the spring of 1971. In those days people in the West spoke of the Holy Mountain only in terms of decline and decay, and there was no lack of voices predicting the complete extinction of Athonite monasticism in the very near future.

This first visit had already given us to understand that categories such as "decline"—or, conversely, "renewal"—are quite inadequate when speaking of Orthodox monasticism. They bring to mind primarily the external, sociological, and statistical aspects of the situation. But the essential thing is the inner life, and that eludes investigations of this kind. There had certainly been a considerable drop in numbers. This was due, so far as the Slavonic monasteries were concerned, to the consequences of the establishment of the Soviet regime in Russia, and, with regard to the Greeks, to the forced exodus in 1922, which had destroyed the flourishing Greek Christian civilization of Asia Minor, and afterwards the Second World War and the Greek Civil War. By 1971, however, this reduction in numbers had stabilized, and the recovery had slowly begun. Then it suddenly accelerated to an unhoped for extent. Thanks to the arrival of large numbers of novices and young monks, monasteries that had contained no more than a few elderly monks came, one by one, back to life again.

It must be made clear that the young monks whom one meets everywhere on Athos today in no way claim to be either renewing or changing its monastic life. On the contrary, they tend rather to take up again the most traditional and strict way of life by abandoning the moderation of idiorhythmic monasticism. They want only to be disciples, and they benefit from the experience of very gifted spiritual fathers, whom the Holy Mountain has never lacked.

The Elder Silouan, who lived on Athos from 1892 to 1938, is well known in the West, thanks to the books of Father Sophrony. But, during the same period, there were many monks on Athos whose intensity of spiritual life yielded nothing to his own. Several monasteries are under the direction of spiritual fathers who were themselves given their formation by Father Joseph, a hesychast (died 1959) whose splendid spiritual letters have recently been published in Greece.

The monks of Mount Athos are often criticized for their opposition to ecumenism, and are quite happily accused of sacrificing love for truth. We readily saw, from the time of our first visit when we were still Roman Catholics with no thought whatever of becoming Orthodox, how well the monks knew how to combine a gracious and attentive love towards other people, whatever their religious convictions and allegiance, with doctrinal intransigence. As they see it, moreover, total respect for the truth is one of the first duties that love for the other requires of them.

They have no particular doctrinal position. They simply profess the faith of the Orthodox Church: "The Church is one. And this one and true Church, which safeguards the continuity of ecclesial life, that is, the unity of the Tradition, is Orthodoxy. To allow that this one and true Church, in its pure form, is not to be found on earth, but that it is partially contained in different 'branches' would be... to have no faith in the Church and in her Head."[21]

Quite simply, the Athonites want this conviction to be in keeping with their deeds. They cannot approve of words or behavior that would seem to imply a *de facto* recognition of the "branch theory." Christian unity, which is as dear to their hearts as anyone's, can only be brought to pass by the agreement of the non-Orthodox to the integrity and fullness of the Apostolic Faith. It could never be the fruit of compromise or of efforts born of a natural and human aspiration for unity among men. This would be to cheapen the deposit of faith entrusted to the Church. In ecumenism, as in the spiritual life, the Athonite position is one of sobriety and discernment. If one wants to please God and enter into His Kingdom, one must know how to assess the movements of one's

feelings as well as the rationalizings of one's mind. Above all, one must give up being "pleasing to men."

The Question of Baptism

During our first conversations with Father Aemilianos, the abbot of Simonos Petras, about our entry into Orthodoxy, he had not concealed from us that, in his eyes, the customary and most appropriate form of entry into the Orthodox Church was through baptism. I had never thought about this aspect of Orthodox ecclesiology and, at the time, was quite surprised by it. I made a careful study of the problem, beginning with the canonical and patristic sources. I also found several articles, written by Catholic and Orthodox theologians and canonists, to be quite helpful.[22]

After a thorough examination of the question, and with the full agreement of our new abbot, it was decided that, when the time came, we would be received into the Orthodox Church by baptism. This later aroused surprise and sometimes indignation in those Catholic or Orthodox circles that were little acquainted with the theological and canonical tradition of the Greek Church. Since a large amount of inaccurate information has been circulated on this subject, I think it right to give here some historical and doctrinal details that will serve for a better understanding of the facts.

Since the third century two customs have co-existed in the Church for the reception of heterodox Christians: reception by the imposition of hands (or, by chrismation), and repetition of the baptismal rite already received in heterodoxy. Rome accepted only the laying on of hands and strongly condemned the repetition of the baptism of heretics. The Churches of Africa and Asia, on the other hand, held on to the second practice, the most ardent defenders of which were Saints Cyprian of Carthage and Firmilian of Caesarea. The latter two insisted on the bond that exists between the sacraments and the Church. For them, a minister who had separated himself from the Church's profession of faith had separated himself at the same time from the Church herself, and so could no longer administer her sacraments.

From the fourth century, the Roman doctrine on the validity of heterodox sacraments, upheld by the exceptional authority of Saint Augustine in the West, was imposed on the whole Latin Church, at least in matters of baptism. The question of the validity of the heterodox ordination of priests was not generally accepted in the West until the thirteenth century.

In the East, however, thanks especially to the influence of Saint Basil, the ecclesiology and sacramental theology of Saint Cyprian never ceased to be considered as more in conformity with the tradition and spirit of the Church than the doctrine of Saint Augustine [who, in any case, was largely unknown in the Greek-speaking Church—Ed.]. Baptism remained the absolute norm, *akribeia* [lit., exactness]; although, taking into account the practice of those local churches which recognized the baptism of heretics who did not deny the very fundamentals of the faith (the doctrine of the Trinity), it was accepted that when reasons of "economy" demanded it (that is, out of condescension for human weakness) they could be received by the laying on of hands, or chrismation.

The principal canonical basis for the non-recognition of heterodox sacraments is the 46th Apostolic Canon which declares: "We ordain that a bishop, priest, or deacon who has admitted the baptism or sacrifice of heretics be deposed." These Apostolic Canons, confirmed by the VIth Ecumenical Council (in Trullo) in 692, comprise the foundations of Orthodox canon law. The practice of economy in certain cases is authorized by Canon I of Saint Basil the Great.

At a later time, in the seventeenth century, the Russian Orthodox Church came under a very strong Latin influence,* and was partially

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*See above, note 16, and for an extensive treatment of the issue of Latin influences on Russian theology, Father George Florovsky, *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Vols. 5 and 6 of *The Collected Works*. On the matter of receiving Roman Catholics by confession of faith alone, this seems to have been the case in the reception of several million Eastern Rite Catholics in the last century (see the documents collected by A. N. Mouravieff, *A History of the Church of Russia* (trans., R. W. Blackmore, Oxford 1842, reprinted by Saint Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, Pa., pp. 430–448, esp. 438–440), but it is not reflected in the *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox, Catholic and Apostolic Church* (trans. Isabel Florence Hapgood), 4th ed., Brooklyn 1965 pp. 454–467. In that Miss Hapgood was translating from

won over to the position of Saint Augustine. She then decided to receive Catholics into Orthodoxy by confession and a profession of faith alone. From the perspective of traditional Orthodox theology, this could only be accepted as a very generous instance of recourse to the principal of economy.

This explains the apparent contradictions found in the canonical texts of the Councils and the Fathers, as well as in the practice of the Orthodox Church down the centuries. So far as present practice is concerned, the reception of Catholics by baptism is very clearly prescribed in the Pedalion, an official compendium of canon law for the Churches of the Greek language, in which the text of the canons is accompanied by commentaries by Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, a very great authority. For the territories under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the decree prescribing the rebaptism of Catholics has never been abolished.

As for the Church of Greece: "Those who wish to embrace Orthodoxy must be invited to rebaptism, and only in those cases where this is not possible should they be received by anointing with Holy Chrism."[23]

Athos is a country where only monks live, who by virtue of their calling must strive to live out as best they can all the demands of Christian life and the Church's Tradition. They engage in no pastoral activity, nor do they seek to proselytize, that is, to draw people to Orthodoxy by making things easier for them. It is therefore normal for them to abide by *akribeia*, though without blaming those who, finding themselves in different circumstances, have recourse to economy.

Athos's vocation is *akribeia* in all spheres. It is normal for the non-Orthodox who become monks there to be received by baptism. Yet the monks of Athos are not men given to the constant condemnation of

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the Russian service books in use at the turn of the century, one would presume that a special exception for Roman Catholics would have been included in the prescriptions for the reception of converts. There is no such indication, however, and Catholics appear to have been bundled together with Protestants and other groups whose baptism is deemed "valid." The use of the latter term also, of course, reflects a certain influence from the West—ED.

others, nor do they prefer severity to mercy, nor are they attached to a narrow-minded rigorism. The issue is on an altogether different level.

Some people have written that by "imposing" a new baptism on us, the monks of Athos forced us to repudiate and mock the whole of our past as Catholic monks. Others have also written that, to the contrary, it was we who asked for baptism, contrary to the wishes of our abbot, in order to satisfy the most rigorous minority of Athonite monks.[24]

These assertions have nothing to do with reality. The monks of Athos in fact imposed nothing on us. They did not oblige us to become Athonite monks, and they left us perfectly free to be received into Orthodoxy by different means elsewhere. Nor were we looking to please anyone at all. But since we had chosen, as we said above, to become monks of Mount Athos, we could only be received in the way accepted by men whom we held to be our fathers and brothers, and whose way of thinking we knew perfectly well. We asked freely to be received by baptism, in complete agreement with our abbot, because this procedure seemed to us both right and necessary for Athos, both theologically sound and canonically correct. This was not to "deny" our Catholic baptism received in the name of the Trinity, but to confess that everything it signified was fulfilled by our entry into the Orthodox Church. It was not to deny the real communion that exists between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in much of their doctrine and sacramental practice, but it was to recognize that this communion in the faith is not perfect, and that, consequently, according to the most exact form of Orthodox theology, Catholic sacraments cannot be purely and simply recognized by the Orthodox Church.

I have been asked for my retrospective opinion on the sacraments that we had ourselves administered while still priests of the Roman Church. I would simply reply that the Orthodox Church speaks more willingly about the "authenticity" and "legitimacy" of sacraments than about their "validity." Only sacraments administered and received in the Orthodox Church are "authentic" and "legitimate" and, according to the usual order of things, the validity, or effective communication of grace, depends on this legitimacy. But the Holy Spirit is free with

His gifts, and He can distribute them without going through the usual channels of salvation wherever He finds hearts that are well-disposed. Saint Gregory the Theologian said once: "Just as many of our own people are not really with us, because their lives separate them from the common body, so on the other hand many belong to us who outwardly are not ours, those whose conduct is in advance of their faith, who lack only the name, although they possess the reality itself" (*PG* 35, 992). He goes on to cite the case of his own father who before his conversion was "a foreign bough, if you wish, but by his way of life, a part of us." We can therefore only leave this matter, with complete confidence, to the mercy of God.

Return to France

We were received into the Orthodox Church on June 19, 1977. A few months later, on February 26, 1978, we became monks of Simonos Petras. We had told our abbot that we were equally prepared to stay on the Holy Mountain or return to France, leaving the decision to him. He thought it better that we establish ourselves in France. Thus two *metochia* [Russ, *podvorie*, subsidiaries] of Simonos Petras were formed: one at Martel on the Quercy plateau, and the other in Dauphine, in a deep valley of the Vercors.

By reason of their status as *metochia*, these two monasteries are directly dependent on Simonos Petras, which, like all the Athonite monasteries, is under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch. Any activity outside the monastery is done within the framework of the Greek Orthodox Metropolia in France and with the blessing of its Metropolitan, Meletios, with whom we enjoy a very close and trusting relationship.

The Situation of the Orthodox Church in France

On entering the Orthodox Church we were not surprised on finding a less than exemplary organization, one not outwardly similar and parallel to the Catholic Church. During a visit to Belgrade just before our

reception into the Church, a Serbian bishop had remarked: "No doubt the Church will appear to you as a shambles. Do not be surprised by this. It is inevitable if the Holy Spirit is to be left free to work and not be supplanted." This same impression had already been given us by the Church of the Fathers. Things had changed in the Latin Church along with its gradual centralization of authority in Rome—but that is another problem.

The situation that faced us in France was further complicated by the fact that the Orthodox Church was established there by various Greek and Russian emigrations. This resulted in the serious canonical anomaly of a plurality of jurisdictions over the same territory. Another anomaly is presented by the strong national characteristics that mark the different groups, a fact deriving from the plurality of jurisdictions. But, there it is: we are confronted by a situation common to all diasporas, and it would be utopian to claim to have an immediate remedy. In difficult conditions there are some advantages in the plurality of jurisdictions; this multiplicity can contribute towards the preservation of an authentic spiritual freedom.

The jurisdictions are, fundamentally, only dioceses which have the fault of overlapping one another, but which are all the Church of Christ. The fact that they come under different Mother Churches changes nothing. In each parish where the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, it is the Church of God present; one must be aware of this fact before anything else, and not make impenetrable barriers out of jurisdictional allegiances. When Saint Irenaeus celebrated at Lyons ca. A.D. 180–190, it was not the Church of Smyrna that was represented: the assembled community, made up of Greek tradesmen and Gallic neophytes, was simply the Church of God at Lyons. If one day it should happen that all the Orthodox parishes in France are united under the authority of a single archbishop and territorial dioceses are established, this would certainly be a good thing since the situation would then be in accordance with the holy canons. But, when all is said and done, this Church, unified in its structure, would be no more the "Church of France"—or rather, the "Church of God in France"—than the present jurisdictional

mosaic. Moreover, any premature autonomy would not be without its own risks.

What is important above all is to have a sense of, and love for, the unity of the Church. It is inevitable among Orthodox, even healthy, that there should be differences in opinions and sympathies. But, so long as these differences apply only to what is secondary and do not call into question either the faith or the fundamental discipline of the Church, they should never lead to enmity or exclusion, still less to a break in communion.

Our position as Athonite monks in France has the advantage of placing us outside certain jurisdictional antagonisms. For centuries Athos has had a "pan-Orthodox" vocation: monks from very different nationalities mingle together there and share a common experience of belonging to the "Garden of the Mother of God." We would like our presence in France to be such a unifying factor, a cause of spiritual convergence among Orthodox of differing origins.

CONCLUSION

An old monk of the Holy Mountain said to us one day: "You are not Roman Catholics converted to Greek Orthodoxy. You are Western Christians, members of the Church of Rome, who are back in communion with the Universal Church. This is something far greater and much more important." And, as he said this, great tears ran down his cheeks... To be sure, we have been "converted," in the sense that we have moved from the Roman Church—towards which we remain immensely grateful for all that we have received from our families and from this Christian people which carried us for so long—to the Orthodox Church.

But this Orthodox Church is not an "eastern" Church, an "oriental" expression of the Christian faith. She is the Church of Christ. Her tradition was the tradition common to all Christians throughout the early centuries, and, by entering into communion with her, we did no more than return to this common source. We have not "changed Churches": we have only gone from a separated bough of the One Church to the fullness of that Church.

We feel ourselves entirely to be of the number of those Western Christians who: "By asking to be received into the Orthodox Church have not, however, denied that which, in the West, and more particularly in their country, before and since the separation and schism, bore the mark of the Spirit of God, Who blows where He wills."[25]

We are Orthodox monks, called to live the tradition of the Holy Mountain in the land of France. We know that the mission of the monk "is not to accomplish something by his own resources, but to bear witness throughout his life that death has been overcome. And this he does only by burying himself in the earth, like a seed."[26]

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Mount Athos and Europe*

THE HISTORIANS OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION have often said that it was the Monks who created Europe.* Doubtless they refer above all to the civilizing and cultural activity of the early monks in Gaul, and to the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monks who evangelized the northwest of Europe in the seventh and eighth centuries, as well as to the Benedictines and Cistercians who exercised considerable influence towards the end of the twelfth century. But all this external activity proceeded from a hidden source, from the intense interior life of these monks: "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). If the monasteries had such an influence, if medieval Europe, through their effort, became a remarkable focus of civilization permeated by the values of the Gospel, it was not primarily due to romanesque basilicas and admirably executed manuscript illuminations and other works of art. It was because in innumerable monasteries, men and women sought to master their passions, to grasp firmly the spirit of the Beatitudes, and to attain that mysterious peace of heart which neither science nor technology can produce. As a great monk of the last century said: "Establish your soul in peace, and thousands around you will be saved."

This can help to understand the place and role that falls to Mount Athos in the Europe of today. It would be a complete mistake with regard to the significance and importance of the Holy Mountain to see it as an admirable conservator of Byzantine civilization, a prestigious museum evoking a dead past. Mount Athos is above all, with its numerous monasteries and the life throughout it, by the fidelity of the monks in preserving a living tradition for over a millennium, by the eminent

* Address given by Father Placide (Deseille) at Thessalonica to representatives of the European Economic Community. Translation by the Rev. Andrew Morbey.

holiness of many, when taken together, the most important spiritual center in Europe.

In past centuries, the influence of Mount Athos was felt primarily in Greece and throughout the Balkan and Slavic countries. But today, in a Europe where national boundaries have become quite open, many westerners are discovering that the spiritual tradition of the Holy Mountain is substantially identical to that lived by their own Fathers, in particular the ancient monks of the West, in an age before schisms and divisions destroyed the spiritual unity of Europe.

In coming on pilgrimage to Mount Athos, in understanding its message, they are recovering the roots of their own culture and their own civilization. They rediscover there the values that alone can give back a creative spirit to a Europe which has a tragic awareness of its immense spiritual emptiness, where only technological and economic development is left and which is all too often devoid of any direction toward a transcendent end. If Europe does not recover its values, it will inevitably be menaced by an internal collapse, leaving it impoverished in the future, and incapable of playing the role it must in a world in which only spiritual and cultural influence can compensate for an increasing demographic inferiority.

In particular, Mount Athos can help to return to Europe an awareness of what its own, unique contribution among the great civilizations of the world must be, that is, to comprehend the meaning of the human person and the idea of a personalist society.

In general, human societies today seem to oscillate between two models of social life, both of which are equally false. On the one hand there reigns a liberalism, or the pursuit of individual interest, in which the collectivity knows no other limit than that imposed by the fear of seeing their self-interest restrained if it happens to go against the interests of other more powerful individuals or groups; society then risks transforming itself into a jungle in which the law of the strongest will prevail, and where the abundance of consumer goods, in the absence of any superior ideal, will asphyxiate the soul. On the other hand, a totalitarianism is imposed which subjects individuals by way of authority

and constraint to an order in which the demands are not accepted by everyone and in which, out of fear for their aims, there is no hesitation to undercut the rights of the person; this creates a world more inhuman than the preceding one.

The pilgrim who visits the large monasteries of the Holy Mountain discovers there, apart from the tensions and difficulties that no human group can hope to escape, harmonious communities where the unity of the collective does not attack the integrity and the blossoming authenticity of the persons who comprise it. The stability of such societies through the centuries, their capacity for renewal after periods of decline that were thought to be fatal, strikes us especially as all the factors for disintegration—differences in age, culture, origin, and race—are not lacking there. Mount Athos does not give us only the promise of a new world and an alternate society: it is not merely theoretical, but delivers the real experience to us. It manifests to us that a real transformation in human relationships can be accomplished if we let the Holy Spirit, Who makes all things new, act.

The key to this harmony is without doubt the fact that the Athonite monk listens to the Gospel and to the masters of the spiritual life—Saint Basil the Great, Saint Theodore the Studite, Saint Athanasius of Mount Athos, Saint Gregory Palamas—in which the integrity of the person and his ultimate happiness is insisted upon. It is not found in the satisfaction of self-interest and the pursuit of every pleasure. On the contrary, because the human person is made in the image of God, who is love (1 John 4:8), it cannot find its true happiness except in God, and in the free and joyful renunciation of all individualism, in entering into communion with others and blossoming in all those who are united. The monk knows that the renunciation of his tastes, and his own preferences, of his individual interests, is a life-giving death that opens up the joy of the communion *[koinonia]* of persons, of the true *koinonia* of all, in God.

This teaches us that the institution of a just and happy fraternal society does not depend primarily on the reform of structures and the mastery of economic processes. It depends above all on what the Gospel

calls *metanoia*, change of spirit, interior transformation. It demands that each person struggle each day, with the help of God, in the ordinary and humble circumstances of his existence, against his egoism, against his thirst for pleasure, against his individualistic tendencies, and to attend to hearing the inner voice which whispers that only then will true joy be found—this joy which is visible to anyone who visits the Athonite monasteries today. It still requires that authority and institutions respect the legitimate diversity of persons, who all have their own way of living the common ideal, and refuse to impose central and tyrannical power. Thus are the words of the psalmist fulfilled: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"

But the pilgrim who today follows the rocky paths of the Holy Mountain, traversing a virgin terrain, sweetened with the scent of the broom and spangled with all the flowers of spring, discovers not only the ways to the great cenobitic monasteries. He will perhaps catch a glimpse of some solitary shrine, or of a hermit, alone with the Alone, interceding with tears for the entire world.

Who can comprehend the force and power of this prayer? Are not such men the pillars of Europe and the universe?

The existence of the hermit does not in any way contradict the meaning of community. His solitude is not the fruit of individualism or of misanthropy. To go towards God, and at the same time to reach the deepest chamber of his love, requires that man have silence and solitude. These are the two indispensable elements of the Personalist understanding of social life, in complete opposition to any kind of gregariousness. In getting to what is essential, in approaching the Center, the solitary simultaneously draws near to all that which converges towards the Center. And this is why the heart of the hermit overflows with such love, with such compassion towards all.

What a lesson there is in all this for our Europe, where these values of silence and solitude are so often lost and forgotten. And what an example, and also what support for so many people today, in refusing the lies and forced compromises of the contemporary world, in a tragic interior solitude (if not the solitude of prisons, exile, or concentration camps!)

without any support other than the inner strength given to them. It is in this respect that the Holy Mountain can contribute answers to the new problems of our times, to Europe today; that is, answers not with hasty improvisations or innovations with unforeseen consequences, but with solutions inspired by creative fidelity to the Christian values of our culture. This itself sufficiently justifies the interest the European nations should take in Mount Athos, and the responsibility they must bear to safeguard the privileged status that the Byzantine Empire, then the Ottoman Empire, and finally the Greek nation have always accorded it, that it may effectively maintain its witness.

MP
ΘV

Part Two

The Garden of the Theotokos, Portal of the Kingdom

> Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
>
> —*Psalm 125:1*

We have chosen to include in this second section three short documents from the past of Mount Athos, and do so in order to illustrate certain threads that run through the life of the Holy Mountain to the present day: the Mother of God, the saints, and the lived experience of the world to come which defines the saint and makes of him or her an icon in flesh and blood of the Resurrection. The three are of course interconnected. As Father Macarius notes below, the Virgin Mother is both the Protectress and the model of the monks (and, be it noted, of all Christians). The conception within her of God the Word is the beginning of our salvation not only in the objective and historical sense, as known in the past events of the Annunciation and Nativity—but in a personal and subjective way as well. Christ speaks of the Kingdom of God as a "seed" that falls on good ground or dry, rocks or thorns. When the seed lands on good earth, in a soul that is ready to receive and cultivate it, then it will bear fruit. All are thus called to become, as it were, pregnant with the seed of God's word and to carry Christ within. All are called to travails as a woman in childbirth, "but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child has come into the world."[2] The saints are imitators of Mary the Virgin, those in whom the Child of faith lives and moves and speaks. This is how they are also witnesses of the world to come, the New Jerusalem, "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a

bride adorned for her husband."[3] The Virgin Mother is first among this company of the heavenly Zion, and paradigm for all who follow.

It is a real company, too, a loving family and the model of families, each aiding and supporting the other throughout this life and into eternity. The Theotokos is a true Protectress, an active Patroness. This is the ineradicable faith of the Athonites. So, too, are the saints such as Saint Simon the flowing-with-Myrrh, founder of Simonos Petros, whose life we have included here. All are present, as examples, as witnesses, and as friends and kinsmen in the Spirit who reply to the petitions of those still in the world and come to their aid and support. The monks live in a world that is larger, much larger, than the one we normally inhabit. Ours is bound by its four dimensions and, seemingly, cut off from God and His saints. They serve us well, then, in testifying to the Christian universe of heaven and the heavenly society.

The third text included below is just such a testimony, perhaps the most important document ever to come from the Holy Mountain. Composed by Saint Gregory Palamas and signed by all the leading figures of Athos in 1340–1341, the "Hagiorite Tome (Decree of the Holy Mountain)" is a solemn affirmation of the prophetic and charismatic nature, as we defined those terms in our "Introduction " above, of the Orthodox, Catholic faith. Although couched in language that is often rather technical and complex, it merits careful attention and the little extra time which its reading will require. This is not the place for a detailed exposition of the Tome's background in Orthodox theology and spirituality, and readers interested in pursuing the latter are invited to consult the works of Father John Meyendorff.[4] But we can note here that its fundamental affirmations provide the foundation for everything that follows in this book. Briefly, these affirmations are six: 1) human nature comprises both body and soul (νοῦς); 2) God the Word became man, wholly and perfectly, and therefore 3) we are called to become, soul and body, participants of His divinity; 4) in the world to come, this glory, which is God's eternal radiance, will be visible to all, but 5) even now, in this life and in every generation, there are those who have tasted and

seen it; and 6) whose witness is to be trusted by as many of us as have not been so favored.

How may we be so graced? For that, we refer the reader to Father Aemilianos's talks on the "Prayer of Jesus" and "The Transfiguration" below. Suffice it to say here that such is the goal of our life as Christians, the very content of the heavenly Jerusalem "which cannot be moved, but abides forever." We turn then to its witness in "those who have trusted in the Lord" and have spoken to us of the light which shines from Zion through their words and lives.

3

The Garden of the Mother of God

When the most holy Mother of God appeared to Saint Peter the Athonite,[1] one of the first saints whom we know of on the Holy Mountain, she said to him: "In Europe there is a mountain, very high and very beautiful, which extends towards the south and very deeply into the sea. This is the mountain that I have chosen out of all the earth, and I have decided to make of it the country of the monastic order. I have consecrated it to be henceforth my dwelling: this is why people will call it the "Holy Mountain." All who shall come to live there after having decided to fight the battle against the common enemy of the human race will find me at their side throughout their lives. I will be their invincible aid, I will teach them what they must do and what they must avoid. I myself shall be their tutor, their physician, their nurse. I shall take care to give them both food and the care that their bodies require, and that which is necessary for their souls, to inspire and invigorate them, so they depart not from virtue. And all who finish their lives on this mountain in a spirit of love for God and repentance, I promise to recommend to my Son and God that He accord them complete remission of their sins."[2]

The Mother of God, as a matter of fact, is present everywhere on this ground that she has chosen. The miraculous icons, the liturgical services that are dedicated to her every day (Akathistos, Paraclesis, canons of the Theotokarion, etc.), her innumerable and miraculous appearances (which continue to occur to the present day), the prayer and constant beseeching (night and day) which her servants, who join her name with that of our Lord Jesus Christ so as to unite it with their breathing and make it descend into their hearts, make of this "enclosed garden" (Song of Songs, 4:12), of this temple of the Mother of God, the "gate of heaven."[3] Certain Russian icons of the last century portray the All-Holy one as clothed like an abbess, with purple *mandyas* and

pastoral staff, presiding on the clouds over Mount Athos. In the same sense, at the Serbian monastery of Hilandar, the throne of the abbot is occupied by the miraculous icon of the "Three Hands."[4] All the monks have a deep feeling for this reality: the Mother of God is the abbess of the Holy Mountain, their model and guide to the Kingdom of Heaven. Since what is the monastic life if it is not the continuation of her virginal motherhood? In the same sense that, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God descended into the immaculate bosom of the Virgin and clothed Himself with human nature, so those who have promised to keep not only their bodies but their souls virginal, receive in themselves the divine seed through the mystical descent of the Holy Spirit.[5] The Spirit of adoption to sonship makes the seed which is Christ grow, triumph and shine within them with all the splendor of His divinity, no longer corporeally, but spiritually.

This is why the Mother of God is the archetype of the monk, the model of all Christian holiness, the "place" where the mysteries of God's incarnation and man's deification is accomplished, that she occupies this exclusive and privileged place on Mount Athos. This is why, since Mount Athos's establishment as her garden, access is forbidden to every other woman.

4

Life of Saint Simon the Myrrh-flowing

Founder of the Monastery of Simonos Petras, Whose Feast is the 28th of December

SAINT SIMON bloomed in the Garden of the Mother of God during the thirteenth century, in the period when the Byzantine Empire found itself divided and weakened—in consequence of the Fourth Crusade (1204)—and when its capital had been transferred to Nicea [until 1261].* Fleeing the vanities of the world, Simon made his way to the Holy Mountain to work there for his soul's salvation at the side of a spiritual father. He chose an Elder, one not only experienced in ascesis but austere and demanding as well, and submitted himself to him in body and soul as to God Himself. His exemplary obedience, his humility, his love for his spiritual father, who nonetheless spared him no reproach or even blows, quickly elevated him to a high degree of virtue. He drew the admiration of the monks of Athos and the respect of his Elder who finally considered him no longer his disciple, but instead his companion at arms in spiritual combat.

Yet these marks of honor did not suit him who had chosen to embrace the abandonment and passion of Jesus: thus he obtained, by dint of his insistence, permission to live apart by himself. After much searching, he chose as his dwelling a narrow, humid cave, situated on

*This text has been taken from the *Orthodox Synxarion*, vol. 2, compiled by Makarios, monk of Simonos Petras. This synaxarion will contain the biographies of all the Athonite saints. From another source, the monks of Simonos Petras are preparing a panorama of all the saints who have lived on the Holy Mountain or who have spent a great part of their lives there (more than two hundred).

the western flank of Athos at an elevation of one thousand feet above the sea. There he persevered night and day, exposed to the unceasing attacks of the demons and armed only with faith, hope, and the invocation of the all-powerful Name of our Lord.

One night, a few days before the Feast of the Nativity, he saw a star suddenly come down from the sky and rest on top of the crag situated opposite his cave. Suspecting a new trick of the evil one, who often transforms himself into an angel of light (cf. 2 Cor. 9:14), the ascetic put no faith in it. For several nights running the apparition repeated itself, up to the eve of the Nativity when, the shining having descended on the rock like the star of Bethlehem, a voice was heard from heaven: "Do not doubt this, Simon, faithful servant of My Son! See this sign and do not leave this place in order to find greater solitude, as was your intention. For I want you to found here a monastery for the salvation of many souls." Immediately, reassured by the voice of the Mother of God, Simon was then transported, as in an ecstasy, to Bethlehem before the Christ child together with the angels and the shepherds. When he had come back to himself, he undertook the construction of the "New Bethlehem" without further delay. A little after this vision, three young brothers belonging to a wealthy family of Macedonia (or perhaps of Thessaly), having heard the virtues of Saint Simon praised, came to him. Like three new "Wise Men," they placed all their wealth at his feet and demanded that he accept them as disciples. Then the builders came. But the latter, when the saint showed them the area chosen for construction, refused to build atop a place surrounded by such cliffs and of so perilous an access, and accused him of having lost his mind. Suddenly, one of the brothers, who was bringing them something to drink, slipped and fell down a steep cliff. His death was certain and appeared to confirm the workers' complaints. But, imagine their stupefaction when they saw, thanks to the prayer of Saint Simon, the brother climbing back up at once safe and sound, and still carrying the pitcher of wine and glasses which he at once put at their service. Converted, the builders became monks and, during the construction, could on several occasions confirm that God had accorded his servant immense power.

The construction completed, the "New Bethlehem" had begun to be peopled with a goodly number of monks when, one day, Moslem pirates landed on shore. Saint Simon went down to greet them with presents, hoping to dissuade them from pillaging the monastery. Unsatisfied with the gifts, they immediately began to attack him savagely and were suddenly blinded. One of them, who had brandished his sword at the saint, found that his arm was paralyzed. Once they had been cured by the prayer of the man of God, they all repented, received holy Baptism, and became monks.

After having shown for many years the favor that God had accorded him through many miracles, through prophecies, and especially through his illumined teaching, Saint Simon fell asleep in the peace of Christ, in the presence of his disciples whom he had called together in order to impress on them a last time the importance of keeping the traditions he had entrusted to them in the fear of God: faith, mutual charity, and total obedience to their abbot and spiritual father. Subsequently, the saint's tomb began to give forth a flow, like water from a spring, of a fragrant oil with miraculous properties (hence the name, the myrrh-flowing). But the repeated devastations suffered by the monastery have left us no trace of either his sepulchre or his relics. In any event, the saint never ceases from being present invisibly in having manifested, on several occasions, his protection of the obedient, and his severe disciplining of the impious and negligent. On the occasion of his annual feast, some may occasionally see a divine light springing from his cave or overshadowing his icon in the church like a canopy.

A century after the saint's falling asleep, the daughter of the Despot of the Serbian principality of Macedonia (with its capital at Serres), John Uglesh, was delivered from an evil spirit thanks to the saint's intercession. As a sign of his gratitude, her father transformed the saint's little monastery into a rich foundation endowed with many properties. Later, the monastery was also to know its share of misfortunes. Three times it was destroyed by fire (1581, 1625, and 1890). In the eighteenth century it underwent such a decline that it was closed and placed at the disposal of the Turkish authorities. In 1763, the blessed Paissy Velichkovsky, the

great restorer of the hesychast tradition in the Slavonic lands, installed himself there along with his sixty-nine monks. However, on being assailed immediately by Turkish creditors, he decided to leave Athos for Moldavia, where his community knew an extraordinary success. It was only in 1801 that "New Bethlehem" returned to cenobitic life. Since 1973, the monks who have come to it from Meteora have given it a new life. Today a community of around sixty monks of several nationalities walk together there towards the Kingdom of God under the protection of Saint Simon.

5

The Tomos of Mount Athos In Defense of the Hesychasts

Against those who, because of their own lack of experience and of faith in the saints, deny the mystical activities of the Spirit which, in greater ways than speech can express, are at work in those who live in accordance with the Spirit and which, though manifested in deeds, have not yet been demonstrated by words.

TEACHINGS THAT TODAY are daily discussed and common knowledge to all, that are proclaimed with complete freedom, were at one time the mysteries of the Mosaic Law and foreseen in the Spirit only by the prophets. The good things promised to the saints in the world to come, however, are mysteries of the Gospel life and are given to and seen beforehand only by those whom the Spirit has made worthy of seeing—and even then only in moderation and, as it were, in partial earnest. Just as a Jew of ancient times would not have gladly listened to the prophets saying that God's Word and Spirit were coeternal with Him and from before the ages, but would have thought that he was hearing opinions forbidden by piety and opposed to the confession of the devout, by which we mean: "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4); just so might someone who had not listened reverently feel today regarding the mysteries of the Spirit which are known only to those who have purified themselves for the sake of virtue. But, just as the fulfillment of the prophecies proved that what were mysteries before were in full agreement with what later was made manifest—such that now we believe in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, divinity in three Persons, a single simple nature, uncomposed, uncreated, invisible and incomprehensible—so, too, the mysteries of the age to come have been unveiled in our own time in accordance with the inexpressible manifestation of

the one God in three perfect Persons, and these latter mysteries shall be shown forth as in harmony with everything that has already been revealed.

We are therefore obliged to consider that, just as the Three-Personhood of the Godhead was later made manifest to the ends of the earth (with the unity of the Godhead inviolate because of the Father's Monarchy), but was clearly recognized by the prophets before the events of the Incarnation and was accepted without difficulty by those who believed in them, thus, in the same way, neither do we now avoid confessing the teachings of those things that are proclaimed boldly by the saints made worthy of mystical revelations in the Spirit. Some are initiated into these things by the experience itself. They are as many as have not only renounced the ownership of things for the sake of the Gospel life, and the good opinion of other men, and the doubtful pleasures of the flesh, but have as well confirmed their renunciation by submission to those who have arrived at maturity in Christ. For, having exclusively applied themselves in retreat and in heartfelt prayer to God, they have gone beyond themselves, have entered into God by means of that mystical union with Him that transcends even the intellect, and have been initiated into what is beyond intellection. Others, though, have learned of these things through their reverence for such men, their trust in them and devotion. This is the example that we too follow who listen to what the great Dionysius says in his second epistle, "To Gaius." We are persuaded that God transcends his own gift of deification, that He Who transcends divinity and deity and goodness is also beyond that grace which He bestows on those who are worthy. For God suffers no multiplication. No one says that there are two divinities. Yet, as the divine Maximus says concerning Melchizedek, the deifying gift of grace from God, Who is eternally, is itself revealed as uncreated and existing forever. The same saint often says elsewhere that it appears to the worthy (whenever they do indeed become worthy of it) as an ingenerate and personal light, but never as something created for the occasion. The same also calls this phenomenon the light of ineffable glory and the purity of the angels. The great Macarius calls it in addition the food of

the bodiless powers and the glory of the divine nature, the beauty of the age to come, divine and heavenly fire, light ineffable and intelligible, the earnest of the Holy Spirit, the unction of joy which makes us holy.

Therefore, whoever ranks those who call this deifying grace uncreated, unbegotten, and personal, with the Messalians, or else calls them di-theists, whoever this person may be, let him understand that he opposes the saints of God and that, unless he repent, he has cast himself out of the inheritance of the saved and fallen away from the One Who alone is by nature the God of the saints. But, whoever believes in and is persuaded by and agrees with the saints, and who does not make up excuses for his sins, this person will not reject what the saints have clearly said merely because he is ignorant of it. Let him rather, as not knowing the manner of the mystery, not think it unworthy of himself to ask and learn from those who do know. He will learn that there is nothing in these things that is inconsistent with God's word and deeds, but that they are most necessary, and that without them nothing whatever would exist, nor would there be any mystery at all adequate to God.

Whoever asserts that the perfect union with God is accomplished without the deifying grace of the Spirit, but is only a relative thing and accomplished by imitation, in a way similar to people who are fond of each other and grow alike in their ways; and, moreover, who says that the deifying grace of God is a condition inherent in our rational nature which becomes active merely by virtue of this moral imitation, but that it is not a supernatural and inexpressible illumination and divine activity which is seen invisibly by those made worthy of it and comprehended incomprehensibly: this person should know that he has tumbled unaware into the error of the Messalians. For, if deification be a potential inherent in nature and so included within the definition of nature, then he who is deified must necessarily be himself God by nature. Such a person should not then attempt to smear those who stand fast with his own rebellion and try to blame the faith of the blameless. Instead, putting aside his own opinion, let him learn from those who are experienced or who have been taught by those with experience that the grace or divinity is not related to anything else whatever, nor does there exist

any potential in nature capable of receiving it, since it would otherwise not be grace but merely the manifestation of an activity proper to our being. Deification would not be miraculous if it should occur as the result of some potential for its reception, for in that case it would clearly be a work of our nature instead of God's gift, and the person deified would then in fact be able to become God by nature and to acquire the title of "Lord"! For the natural potential of everything that exists is comprised of nothing other than the unswerving impetus of nature toward its proper activity. How in that case could deification be said to take the one deified outside of himself? If it were still to take place within the bounds of nature, then this [traditional] expression would be meaningless. The grace of deification is therefore beyond nature, beyond virtue and knowledge, and, according to Saint Maximus, all these things fall infinitely short of it. While every virtue, including that imitation of God that is within our power, prepares a capacity in the recipient for divine union, it is still grace that accomplishes the unutterable union itself. It is by means of grace that all of God co-indwells with all of those who are worthy, and that the whole of the saints co-inheres wholly with the whole of God. Thus they receive into themselves God entire and, as a kind of reward for their struggles in ascending to Him, they possess Him, Himself alone, Who has made them worthy of becoming His members, and He indwells them as a soul is entwined with its own body.

Whoever affirms that they are Messalians who say that the intellect is located in the heart or the head, let this person know that he is inveighing against the saints. While the great Athanasius says that the reasoning faculty is in the head, Macarius, who cedes nothing to him in greatness, holds that the activity of the intellect is to be found in the heart. With these two practically all the saints concur. What the divine Gregory of Nyssa says, that the intellect is bodiless and neither within nor outside the body, does not contradict the others. For the former say that the intellect is within the body in as much as it is joined to it. Since they were speaking about different aspects of the matter, they differ with him scarcely at all. Nor, indeed, does he who says that God is not confined to place in that He is bodiless differ with him who also says

the Word of God entered once into a spotless, virgin womb in order there to be united, beyond speech, with our substance on account of His ineffable love for mankind.

Whoever says that the light that flashed around the disciples on Tabor was a phantasm, a sort of symbol that came into being and then departed, that had no real existence, that did not transcend thought but was on the contrary an activity inferior to intellection, this person clearly contradicts the opinion of the saints. For the latter, in their hymns and writings, address it as unspeakable, uncreated, eternal, timeless, unapproachable, immense, infinite, boundless, transcending the vision of men and of angels, archetypal and unchanging beauty, the glory of God, of Christ, of the Spirit, ray of divinity, and other similar things. This is because they hold that the flesh of Christ was glorified at the instant of His conception, and that the glory of His divinity became in consequence the glory as well of His body. But, for those who were unable to endure that splendor on which the angels dare not gaze, this glory was not made manifest in His visible body. Thus, in His transfiguration, it was not that He took of something that He was not before, nor that He was changed into something else, but that He then appeared to His disciples as He truly was, opening their eyes and giving them to see who before were blind. Yet, both as He appeared before and as He was then seen by the disciples, He remained identically Himself. For He is truly Himself the beauty of the divine glory. He shone like the sun, the latter itself being a dim image of His radiance—but then there is nothing created which may be taken as an image of the uncreated without some loss.

Whoever says that the essence of God alone is uncreated but not His eternal energies (all of which He transcends as the one acting must always transcend his actions), let this man listen to Saint Maximus, who says:

> All immortal things and immortality itself, all living things and life itself, all holy things and holiness itself, all virtuous things and virtue itself, all good things and goodness itself, all blessings and blessedness itself, all beings and being itself, all are manifestly works of God. Some

> things began to be in time, for there was when they were not. Others, however, did not begin to be in time, for there was no time when virtue, goodness, holiness, and immortality did not exist.

Goodness, and everything which is embraced by the principle of goodness, and simply:

> All life, immortality, simplicity, unchangingness, and infinity, and as much as is contemplated essentially as around God, are the works of God that did not come to be in time, for non-being was never older than virtue, nor any of the other things we have listed, even if those things that participate in them do have a beginning in time. All virtue is without beginning because there is no time prior to it: God is eternally the unique author of its being.
>
> God is infinitely, infinitely above all beings, whether participating or participated.

Let him thus learn from this that everything that takes its origin from God is not necessarily subject to time. Some of His works are without beginning, yet that Tri-Unity, which alone is by nature without beginning, suffers no loss in its supernatural simplicity. In the same way, taking again a dim image of that transcendent simplicity, our human intellect in no way becomes composite by reason of the intellections that are native to it.

Whoever does not accept that the spiritual states perceived in the body derive from the charisms of the Spirit present in the soul and growing into God, and who says that *apatheia* is the habitual mortification of the soul's passible faculty, but not the latter's habitual activity towards what is proper, its complete turning away from evil and toward the good as having put off its evil habits and grown rich in those that are good, this person is of such an opinion that he in consequence denies our eternal abode with the body in the age of incorruption to come. For, if the body shall partake together with the soul in the ineffable good

things—and doubtless even now so shares, insofar as its nature allows, in the grace of God that He gives mystically and inexpressibly to the purified intellect—and itself be completely won over to divine things in its own way, then the soul's passible faculty is transformed and sanctified, and not simply rendered dead by habit. By means of the same faculty, which is common to the soul and the body, grace sanctifies the body's ordering and activities. This is because, according to Saint Diodochus (of Photiki), in the case of those who have liberated themselves from the beauties of this world for the sake of their hope in the good things to come, the mind advances securely on account of its freedom from care. It senses in itself the divine, and inexpressible goodness, and, according to the degree of its progress, it shares its own goodness with the body. That grace which then comes to pass in both soul and body is such that it comprises an unfailing reminder of the life incorruptible.

The light of the intellect is one thing and sense perception in turn another. While the latter explores sensible things insofar as they are sensible, the light of the intellect is that knowledge that inheres in conceptions. Sight and intellect do not lay claim to the same light, but each operates in natural things in accordance with its own nature. But, whenever those who are made worthy are in possession of spiritual and supernatural grace and power, then they see what is beyond all perception and intellect. They see what, borrowing from Saint Gregory the Theologian, God only knows—He and those whom He has moved to such things.

These things we have been taught by Scripture; these we have received from our fathers; these we know by virtue of our own small experience; to these same things, as they have been set down by our brother, Kyr Gregory, most honorable among hieromonks, in exact obedience to the traditions of the saints and in defense of the holy hesychasts, we ourselves subscribe for the assurance of all who may read this:

The protos of the venerable monasteries on the Holy Mountain, Isaac, hieromonk.

The abbot of the venerable, imperial, and holy monastery of Lavra, Theodosius, hieromonk.

The signature of the abbot of the monastery of the Georgians in his own language.

The abbot of the venerable and imperial monastery of Vatopedi, Ioannikios, hieromonk.

The signature of the abbot of the monastery of the Serbs, in his own language.

The least of hieromonks, Philotheus. I agree and have signed.

Least among hieromonks, and spiritual director of the venerable monastery of Esphigmenou, Amphilocius.

Most wretched among hieromonks, Gerasimus. I have seen and read what was written for love of the truth and, accepting it, have signed.

I, wretched elder and least among monks, Moses, do agree and have signed. Least among hieromonks and spiritual director of Vatopedi, Theodosius Abbot of the holy monastery of Koutloumousiou, Theostiriktos, hieromonk.

I, Gerontios Maroulis, a sinner and least among the elders of the venerable Lavra, do agree and have signed.

Kallistos Mouzalon, least among monks.

I, Gregory Stravolagadites, least and wretched among monks, a hesychast, thinking the same and in agreement, have signed.

I, Isaias, elder of the scete of Magoula and least among hieromonks, do agree and have signed.

Mark the Sinaite, least among monks.

Kallistos, of the scete of Magoula and least among hieromonks.

The signature of the elder and hesychast from Syria, in his own language.

Sophronius, least among monks.

Ioasaph, least among monks.

I, Iakovos, humble bishop of Ierissos and the Holy Mountain, having been nourished by the traditions of the Athonites and fathers, and witnessing to what the entire Holy Mountain has agreed to in this address and signed, and agreeing to it myself, do also sign and seal it. Further, in that we have subscribed to this with all the rest, if someone should not agree with the saints as we have done and as our fathers who preceded us have done, we will not accept him into communion with us.

+ Η ΜΕΤΑ
ΜΟΡΦΩΣΙΣ
Ο Ν
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Part Three

The Sayings of the Elders

A multitude of wise men is the salvation of the world.

—*Wisdom of Solomon 6:24*

ANYONE FAMILIAR with the texts of early Christian monasticism will experience a strange familiarity on reading the words and stories of the old men in the following section. They will be familiar because they so precisely recall the sayings and deeds of an Arsenius, an Abba Moses, or a Sisoes. Their lives and the many charisms of the Holy Spirit associated with them breathe the wonder and charm of Saint Athanasius's Life of Antony. Perhaps even more than the gifts of vision, of clairvoyance, and of the glory of God, the reader will be pierced by their humility, unfailing charity, and absolute trust in Jesus Christ—again, more echoes of the Sayings of the Fathers.

There, in that last, lies the strangeness. For these elders and their sayings are not separated from us by a gulf of over a millennium and a half. They are our actual contemporaries, men not of the fourth century or of Byzantium, or even of pre-Soviet Russia, but of the middle and late twentieth century. The reader may feel a slight unease, even a kind of shudder, at encountering a continuity so extraordinary and so unbroken. We hope that that little chill, that sense of the eerie, might lead to the beginning of a deeper appreciation, a more profound reflection. In this offering we arrive at the heart of the Holy Mountain. The voice of the Holy Spirit Himself speaks to us through the words and lives of His saints. Father Macarius dwells on this living continuum in his introductory article, and then provides us with its proof in the "Contemporary Paterikon."

The reader should be wary, indeed. Here there is a great challenge. If these men are not separated from us by the count of centuries, they are

most certainly distant in the quality and flavor of their lives. They speak of and live experiences that we had forgotten, or else had relegated to the safely indulgent place reserved for legends and tales. Here the Gospels take on life. Here the scriptures advance on us out of the realm of myth and threaten our own comfortably (so we had thought) secular and compartmentalized world. Here is evidence of a greater and thoroughly daunting reality. The world is not ours, but God's, and so greatly did He love it that He gave His Son for it and breathed His Spirit upon it. Here there is evidence of the same Breath that has quickened all the generations of the saints.

There is a sign that all pilgrims to Athos come across on their obligatory trip to Karyes, the Mountain's capital. It is like any other road sign, but with a typical difference, and it reads: "Warning! Miracles happen here!" Is it meant to be amusing? Perhaps. A joke? No, it is no joke. The reader is warned.

6

The Light of the Holy Mountain

by Macarius, monk of Simonos Petras

> On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of fat things; they will drink of good wine and be anointed with perfumes... For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain...
>
> —*Isaiah 25:6 and 10*

THIS PROPHECY CONCERNING the last and eternal feast that God will celebrate with men in the heavenly Jerusalem has found a partial fulfillment over the past thousand years on the Holy Mountain of Athos. This strip of earth located at the borders of East and West, its cliffs plunging into the deeps of the Aegean and its peak uniting heaven and earth, was chosen, according to legend, by the All-Holy Mother of God as her "garden," her special dwelling where all who would come to stay would find joy, security, light, and repose. Set apart from the world of corruption, battered by storms but unshakable as a part of eternity in the midst of time, the Holy Mountain over the centuries has exercised an irresistible attraction for every soul in search of God. As soon as one utters the words, "Holy Land" or "Holy Mountain" to a simple believer of Greece or Russia, or Serbia, or Rumania one sees his face lighten immediately, as if he felt the certainty that at least in some particular part of this world one could be assured of finding God. What believer has not dreamed of leaving, like the Russian pilgrim, to go venerate the places hallowed by the presence of the Lord and by that of His saints? At the end of the last century, pilgrims embarked by the thousands from the ports of the Black Sea and, after Jerusalem, came to visit Athos.

While today the world has changed, to be sure, you can still find waves of pilgrims, more numerous every year: from the East and from

the West, from the North and South, Orthodox and people of all faiths, they converge on the Holy Mountain. Like the Jews who used to come periodically from the different regions of Palestine and from the diaspora in order to celebrate the feast together and offer their sacrifices at Zion, in the same way all these thirsty men come towards Athos as toward the "Mountain of the Lord, the mountain where God was pleased to dwell" (Ps. 67:17). Seeing them, you recall the prophecy of Isaiah: "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways, and that we walk in his paths.'" (Isa. 2:2–3) Seeing these pilgrims, you might ask them the question Christ did about the Baptist: "What have you come out to the desert to see?" (Matt. 11:8) What do they come to see? What do they come to do? We ourselves, the monks, are often amazed to see so many men, men so solemn and respectable in the world, moved to tears at leaving us. What have they understood in their short visit? What have they seen? "Reeds blown about by the wind?" Perhaps more than we ourselves, who are often blind, they have grasped that the Lord hides Himself in the folds of our *rason*, that the great mystery of God's union with men is accomplished unceasingly in the daily life of the monks. The pilgrims, who have tasted the world's bitterness, discover then that man can have, here below, the experience of "another life, the measure of life everlasting" (canon of Pascha).

THE MOUNTAIN OF PERFUMES

What does a Christian soul look for, if it is not the Lord? On the Holy Mountain, these men have come to see the Lord Jesus Christ Himself dwelling among His saints. They come to commune with Christ, and to find a more intense experience of the Church, of deified humanity, of the communion of the saints.

Going on foot from monastery to monastery, following the little paths soaked with the sweat and tears of the ascetics where every stone

could tell of the latter's labors and voluntary martyrdom, where the folds of the valleys and the rushing creeks have echoed for a thousand years with the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," today's pilgrim senses that he walks on ground that is holy, purified, bathed with grace, a land where nature itself recalls Paradise, a land that anticipates the "Land of the living." He comes here, first of all, to venerate the relics of the saints—more than two hundred of whom are officially recognized as such by the Church—who are dead for the world but alive in God, who hallowed these places so as to make of Athos the Mountain of the saints, the "Mountain of perfumes," as the Song has it (Song of Songs 8:14), since the perfume of their prayers and their virtues rises to please the Lord and fill the world with fragrance. Among the innumerable relics guarded by Mount Athos, many breathe perceptibly this "perfume" of the Holy Spirit. The many miracles that continually occur, even in our day, through the mediation of these saints or through wonderworking icons, show clearly that the Grace of God is living, perceptible, efficacious, and overflows from this "fertile mountain" (Ps. 68:17). "And in that day," says the Lord's prophet, "the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk... and a mountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord..." (Joel 3:18).

THE GATE OF HEAVEN

On feast days, particularly when a monastery celebrates its Patronal feast, monks and pilgrims stream in great numbers to share in the vigil which lasts all the night (*agrypnia*). As soon as the sun of this world sets in its daily death, the Church is lit with the "gladsome light." She is decked with gold, incense, and precious ornaments, and, during the course of the hours marked by the solemn chant of the monks, she appears in all her glory, the glory of the Bride, of the new Jerusalem which "will come down from heaven" when the Lord will "make all things new" (Rev. 21 and 1 Cor. 5:11f). Having come to see Christ in His glory, monks and pilgrims dance with the angels and the saints tirelessly, as if time no longer existed (cf. Rev. 10:6): "And night shall be no more; they need no light or lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall

reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:4). The liturgical office takes on at these times its true dimension. During these hours you become aware that "death has been overthrown," that man, in Christ, is victorious over the alternation of day and night, over the duality of life and death, waking and sleeping: that once free from the determinism of the cosmos, he is called to the sovereign liberty of the children of God. This is why, within the Church you see the monks behave with the ease and naturalness—but with all the seriousness as well—that children show in their play. On the Holy Mountain everything, in fact, is arranged so as to show the world that the Church is the dwelling-place of God among men, the anticipation of His Kingdom, and that, even in this world in a temple of stone, we may have the experience of His glory and of His everlasting light.

A MODEL OF THE EVANGELICAL LIFE

Some visitors stay at the monastery after having venerated the holy relics or attending a vigil. For one or several days they mingle in the daily life of the monks in all its simplicity. They are given a service (*diakonima*), join the choir in the church, follow in their cells a discipline of reading, meditation, and prayer which is in every respect like that of the monks and novices. Only their clothes distinguish the ones from the others. In a practical and realistic way they share in the life of the monastic family as if they had always taken part in it, and receive thereby the best possible teaching of what the Christian life must be. A monastery, whether at Athos or elsewhere, does nothing other than perpetuate the early Church at Jerusalem, where "all who believed were together and had all things in common; and where, day by day, with glad and generous hearts, they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42–46). Sharing thus for several days in this apostolic life, the pilgrim understands that Christianity is not an ideology, nor a program with vague promises, but that it is life, that it is power, that the commandments of the Lord are possible to practice, that by this evangelical life we can transfigure our earthly life and live with others no longer in rivalry, but as brothers. The

life of every hermitage or of every monastery on Athos, the relations among the monasteries, reveals to the one who has eyes to see that this corner of the world, kept jealously isolated from every contact with the world, offers the model of a Christian society, the living image of a world where men can live in peace, renunciation, and charity, of a city which has the Gospel as its law and where, in conformity with the prophecy, even the household pots themselves bear the name of the Lord (Zech. 14:20).

SPIRITUAL ADOPTION

Often a pilgrim, who has left the world for a time to come and live a little while closer to Heaven on Athos, finds himself no longer satisfied with kissing the relics of the saints, with savoring a foretaste of the light of the world to come, or with communing in the society of the saints. His need is still greater; his quest still more personal. His pilgrimage is perhaps a sign of his decision to take a decisive step on the path of his salvation, to leave the "foreign land," his Egypt or inner Babylon, and come back to Zion in order to find joy and consolation in reconciliation with God: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy" (Ps. 126:1–2). The sinner, who for long years has lived in exile, without confession, finds security at Mount Athos. Among the monks, who live a life so distant from his own, he nevertheless finds the understanding that enables him to relieve himself with confidence of the burden oppressing his conscience. Because, whether exceptional or frequent, confession is always liberation, a renewal of the grace of Baptism. In coming to Mount Athos to receive this sacrament of conversion, like the prodigal son coming back to his father's house (Luke 15:11–32), the penitent is looking to the confessor for a mediator, a father who can stretch out his hand to him, someone who can make Christ Himself present. Certainly, the same mystery is accomplished before any confessor. But at all times, instinctively, men have preferred to turn towards the monks in order to rediscover personal contact with God.

A number of pilgrims come to the Holy Mountain, not just to take the sacrament of confession, but also to find there a man of God, an elder (*geron, staretz*), a being who through asceticism, renunciation, and prayer has been so stripped of egoism that he can let Christ live in him, speak through him, and through him love all who come to him. A man, in short, who can say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Mount Athos has known many periods of decline and of bloom in its thousand years of history. But, known or unknown, silent or placed in the Church's pulpit, in the monasteries, the hermitages, in the clefts of rocks or in caves of the earth, there has never been a lack there of such men of the Spirit. Heart of the Athonite tradition, this mystical chain has transmitted from age to age the inexpressible secret of the great spiritual work. Approaching such an elder in order to ask him for a "word of salvation," there is no need whatever for long conversation, for telling the story of your life, or of your "problems." Because, then and there, you discover yourself naked before him as if before the eye of God, Who "searches out the reins and the hearts of men." Sometimes, in concentrating on the face of one of these fathers transfigured by light, his disciples believed they saw Christ Himself, in person, "in another form" (Mark 16:12). There is here one of the most profound mysteries of the Church, of the presence of God among men: I can speak with Christ face to face, and He answers me. He addresses me, one person to another, and the sharp sword of His word—which often borrows the form of gentle humor, or an aphorism, or a story—pierces me to the heart, right to the point of "division of soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12), killing the "old man" in me and bringing me to rebirth. For such an encounter, some come especially from America or from Australia. They cross mountains, balance on the edges of cliffs, spend the night on the ground in front of the elder's cell, and wait for the time when he is pleased to open the door to them. Often, this good old man is not a priest. He can even be illiterate. But he receives everyone who comes to him, bishops, professors, or peasants with the same noble courtesy, full of decency and dignity, and knows how to adapt his language to each. For everyone, he is *Father.* At the moment when he takes leave

of his visitor, you see him sometimes take his guest by the head and place it gently on his breast, as would a mother with her child, and, with tears, address a prayer to God for the traveler. The foolish distinctions of the world being abolished, the pilgrim ceases to be a mortal given over to corruption. He becomes instead the spiritual son of the Elder who will continue to commemorate his name every day, and who will lift it up toward heaven as on a column of fire. From that time forward, in whatever situation he finds himself, the pilgrim will feel that he is no longer alone in the world, but that he is a member of a vast family, that he, too, has become an adopted son of the Mother of God and that, on the Mountain, a man like Moses lifts up his hands on his behalf while he, like Joshua, does battle on the plain (Exod. 17:9).

THE LAMP OF THE CHURCH

However strictly set apart from men and from the world, the Holy Mountain has exercised over the centuries an irresistible attraction for souls thirsty for "the mighty, the living God" (Ps. 41:2). It seems to cry to them: "*Come and see!*" (1 John 1:40) the place where God rests in His saints. Far from existing outside the Church, however, it is rather her center and unmoved power. The Mountain has a specific ministry with the Church. All the requisite conditions are present to live out there, as in a laboratory, the experience of man's deification, of the transmutation of a fleshly body into a spiritual body, of the earthly Adam into the heavenly man, and so to present to the world, to the Church militant, the model of Christian life. Such has always been the mission of the monks. But Mount Athos, this thousand-year-old metropolis of Byzantine monasticism, looms preeminently as the keystone of the Church's tradition, the criterion of the true faith and of proper observance, whether canonical or liturgical. Whenever the Christian soul feels itself assailed by doubts or *tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles* (Eph. 4:14) it looks toward Athos as toward the anchor of its salvation (Heb. 6:19), and the lighthouse of Orthodoxy. It knows that there the dogmas, the rites, the rules of conduct, the proven methods of asceticism and of

prayer are preserved and put into practice: that all things necessary for the proper glorification of God on earth and the ascent of man toward heaven are there. This incontestable authority held by Athos in the Orthodox Church is not, however, that of a magisterium. It is not a rival to the legitimate teaching authority of the hierarchy, but rather constitutes the latter's prophetic and eschatological complement. The word of Mount Athos has weight and sharpness—even if sometimes some will say, in turning away from it: "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" (John 6:60)—because it is a word of truth, a word of spirit, a "word proven" like gold (Wisd. of Sol. 3:6) in the furnace of asceticism and of the voluntary martyrdom of the conscience (2 Cor. 1:2). The monks hold themselves as lookouts, set to warn the Church from the heights of the Holy Mountain, like the prophet from his watchtower (cf. Hab. 2:1). That this is one of their responsibilities regarding the Church derives its validity from the fact that they have renounced the world, keeping themselves aloof from it with respect to political activities both civil and ecclesiastical.

It is appropriate to note here that, in the West, this function of the Holy Mountain frequently constitutes a "rock of offense," and is often seriously distorted, whether by the adversaries of monasticism or by certain of its over-zealous adherents. Some thus consider Athos as a sort of Orthodox equivalent to the "Holy Inquisition," and portray the Athonites as ferocious fanatics ready, at the drop of a hat, to launch an anathema and cast into hell—on the pretext of heresy—anyone who fails to conform to the strict rules of that tradition of which they claim to be the credentialed guardians. Even if some recent declarations regarding ecumenism or inter-Orthodox relations would seem to bear out this interpretation, such is not the truth. Rather, one should instead understand the content and formulation of these declarations in the prophetic and eschatological context of monasticism, much as we are endeavoring to do in this essay; not, indeed, to relativize the Athonite position, but rather to give it its proper interpretation. This function of vigil and of watchfulness is neither recent nor exclusive to Mount Athos, but has been affirmed by monasticism since its origins. Let it suffice

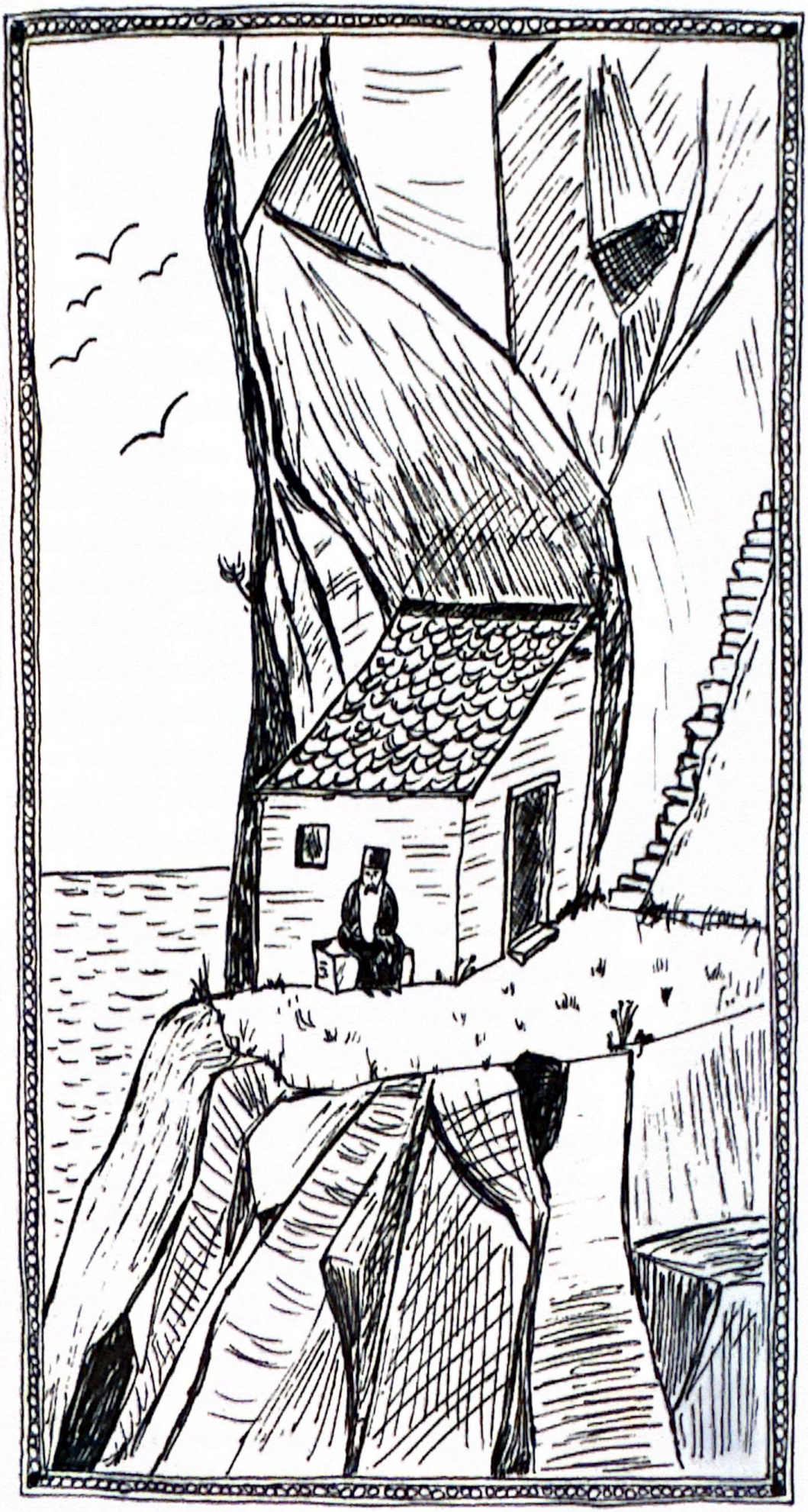
here to recall Saint Antony the Great leaving his desert retreat and, at the urging of Saint Athanasius, going to Alexandria in order to support the Orthodoxy of the Council of Nicea through his presence and the authority of his miracles; or to recall the decisive role of the monks at the Councils of Ephesus (431) and of Chalcedon (451), or in Palestine in the sixth century against the monophysites and origenists (Saints Sabas, Evthymius, Theodosius...); the example of a Saint Maximus the Confessor (seventh century) against the monothelites, or again the thousands of monastic confessors in defense of the Holy icons (eighth and ninth centuries). There is no single, critical period in the history of the Church since the fourth century where the monks have not intervened in order to witness to the truth, often at the price of their own blood. This, the witness to the truth, is why they are held to be the worthy successors of the Martyrs. In any case, however, such is not their primary vocation. In effect, it is always as a result of specific historical circumstances—as, for example, when the hierarchical authority of the Church finds itself incapable of exercising its proper function of dogmatic instruction (whether that be as the result of secular oppression, or due to the contamination of the hierarchy by heresy)—that monks left their monasteries and broke their silence in order to act. It is thus, for example, that during the fourteenth century Saint Gregory Palamas left his retreat at the insistence of the Holy Community of Athos in order to take up the pen against Barlaam and the humanists, and to defend the hesychasts' methods of prayer and the related doctrine of man's deification by uncreated Grace. Indeed, having once taken up provisional residence in Thessalonica in order to be at the heart of the doctrinal conflict, he remained no less a monk; he had installed, in the place which sheltered him, a cell where he persevered, as in his cave, in silence and unceasing prayer.

Once the peace of the Church was re-established, these great fighters for the Faith returned without delay to their monasteries, there to pursue, in silence and far from every worldly preoccupation, their march toward the Kingdom of Heaven. This was, for example, the case of Saint Theodore the Studite who, every time that the persecution

relaxed, gathered together his scattered monks and re-established the life of his immense coenobium. Whenever the Church can live in normal conditions, the monks of Athos or elsewhere keep their silence and persevere in asceticism, detachment, and *hesychia.* It is then that they accomplish the mission for which God has chosen them: to be the silent preachers of the age to come.

THE MOUNTAIN AT THE CENTER OF OUR HEARTS

From the chapel of the Transfiguration, situated at the summit of Athos, a light thus burns before the world. It is the light of which Saint John Climacus spoke, when he wrote: "The angels are a light for the monks, and monastic life is a light for all men." But this light is not of this world. The message of Athos is not in words accessible to the ears of the flesh. Rather, it calls us to ascend the "Holy Mountain" situated at the center of our heart, so that there we may, like the Apostles on the summit of Tabor, gaze upon the Lord in the radiance of His glory (cf. Matt. 17:1–6). After having struggled so greatly, and written so much, Saint Gregory Palamas, this champion of Orthodoxy, this splendid star of Athos, repeated uninterruptedly on his deathbed these words alone: "Heaven, Heaven! To Heaven!..."



7

A Contemporary Athonite Paterikon

COVERED BY THE PROTECTION of the All-Holy Mother of God as by a veil, the Holy Mountain preserves, unchanged and ever alive, every condition favorable to the sanctification of man and the descent of divine grace. These methods of sanctification, tested and proven in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and elsewhere, have been handed down even to our own time, transmitted not just by writing but, especially, by word of mouth, from master to disciple. God, Heaven, the angels, the saints and the miracles represent a world so distant from our contemporary, secularized society that even some Christians have come to doubt its reality. Such believers are often tempted to attribute every manifestation of the supernatural to an exalted imagination. They convince themselves that such experiences, if indeed the saints truly lived them in the past, could still not happen in our day. They thus affirm that these must, in consequence, be considered as "parables" whose "true meaning" we are to discover in some other formulation.

For the Athonites, however, this dimension of existence is more real than material life. The supernatural world is their daily preoccupation, is fully "natural." So easily do they themselves experience this dimension, and so simply and with such familiarity do they speak of it, that many stories fully worthy of the Sayings of the ancient desert fathers circulate on the Holy Mountain without anyone even considering the possibility of putting them down in writing.

The few stories and sayings, for the most part hitherto unpublished, which we have assembled here represent only a few pearls of an inexhaustible treasure that grows the more each day. They have been told us in person by their authors, or else by witnesses whose sincerity is guaranteed by their unquestioned spiritual authority.

FATHER AVVAKOUM OF GREAT LAVRA (+1979)

From the day of his monastic tonsure until his death, Father Avvakoum never wore shoes, excepting only the day of the patronal feast of the monastery (Saint Athanasius the Athonite, July 5th).

He had received from God the gift of being able to recall by memory, until the day of his death, all the books of the Bible. He could, on demand, recite by heart this chapter or that, and then give as well its interpretation by the Holy Fathers. He particularly loved the Wisdom books.

Whenever he would see an airplane passing by overhead, he would immediately hide. Someone asked him one day:

"Why are you hiding, Father? Are you afraid?"

"Oh no, my love; but I am going to say a *komboskhini* so that the airplane doesn't crash, and so that all the passengers arrive safely."

FATHER MYRON OF HILANDAR (+1978)

Father Nicanor, the confessor of the Serbian monastery of Hilandar, tells about Father Myron, who for fifty-six years never left the enclosure of the monastery.

When he became a monk, his spiritual father, on giving him the monk's wooden cross, told him: "From now on, the cross is all your wealth. It is with this cross that you will be buried. Take care never to lose it." Twenty years later, Father Myron fell gravely ill. The monk in charge of the infirmary, who was obliged to give the old monk a rubdown, wondered why his patient stubbornly refused to uncover his chest. When, after many requests, the invalid finally agreed, the infirmarian discovered with astonishment that he had sewn the cross of his profession to his skin and that, over time, the cross had embedded itself in his flesh. The infirmarian told this to the monastery's confessor. The latter said: "We shall see if this comes from spiritual illusion. Take a razor and begin gently to remove the cross." The infirmarian communicated the command to Father Myron. The old man obeyed immediately, and

exposed his chest without hesitation. At this the infirmarian canceled the operation, having been thus assured that the good Father Myron had submitted to this particular ascesis in a spirit of humility and sincere love for Christ.

FATHER N–

One day a young monk asked Father N–, at that time 86 years old, "Elder, how many hours should a monk sleep?"

"Listen, dear brother, Saint Theodore the Studite and Saint Symeon the New Theologian say that for the cenobite [i.e., the monk who lives in a monastery, as opposed to a hermit] four or five hours a day are sufficient. But Abba Arsenius, in the *Sayings of the Fathers*, states that one hour of sleep is sufficient for the monk if he is a spiritual fighter. Saint Acacius of Kavsokalyvia [a hermit of Mount Athos in the eighteenth century] himself used to say that half an hour of sleep is quite enough for a good monk. As for me, a half hour seems a little difficult; but since the saint said it, one is obliged to try..."

"And you, how much time do you set aside for rest?"

"Oh, dear brother. Must you really ask me that?"

"Yes, for my own edification. Tell me, for the love of Christ."

"I'll tell you. Forty-five minutes to an hour is good for me."

"That's enough for you?"

"Oh! It's a lot!"

"Do you sleep all at one time, or at intervals?"

"In intervals, in intervals, of course. A quarter of an hour here, a quarter of an hour a little later..."

"And how do you spend your time?"

"Now that I have a double hernia, unfortunately I can no longer remain standing. So I stay seated and read the Psalter and the Gospel, then say the Jesus Prayer for a little while."

"The whole Psalter, and the whole Gospel?"

"Certainly, all of it, all of it."

"Every day?"

"Every day, every day. Only, I can no longer read them while standing. What can you do? That's what happens when you get old."

FATHER HESYCHIUS OF CONSTAMONITOU (+1978)

In February, 1978, one of the elders of the community of Constamonitou complained that old Father Hesychius never came to the refectory and was leading an idiorhythmic life by going to eat alone in his cell. He therefore asked a young hieromonk to go tell him that in behaving this way he was sinning and scandalizing the other brothers. One Wednesday, when Father Hesychius had taken his bowl of lentils and was making his way toward the monastery gate (his obedience in these last years), the young hieromonk stopped him and said: "Father Hesychius, bless me! I want to confide something in you. Please don't take it badly. You know how much I love and respect you, but, for the love of Christ, tell me why you don't come to the refectory. The fathers are all disturbed about it." Father Hesychius smiled, and in his special, calm way said: "I love you, too, Father, and I'll tell you my secret. Only, don't tell it to anyone before I die. When I became a monk, under the name of Gabriel, I had a lot of zeal. I was going to become another Saint Antony. I was leading a very strict, ascetic life and, finally, fell ill. I was quite out of my head and couldn't understand anything anymore. Old Father Dositheus took me then with him and we made a tour of the monasteries to ask the help of the holy fathers. After we had visited them all, I still wasn't any better. At last, we came to venerate the belt of the Mother of God at Vatopedi. As soon as I touched my head to it I was cured. Afterwards, my confessor gave me as a rule the order not even to drink water on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. If I go to the refectory my stomach opens, and afterwards I can't keep the fast. There's my secret, and I've never told it to anyone except you." A week later, Father Hesychius was found dead close to the gate of the monastery. He had had a heart attack at the moment of lighting the vigil lamp before the icon of Saint Stephen, the Patron saint of the monastery. For years he had endured, without a word, the reproaches of the other monks for his unusual conduct. In his

cell they couldn't even find a change of clothes, only three cans, in which he used to put the dry bread he would take from the refectory, without eating it, on the days of fasting. In church, he used to remain standing, his prayer-rope in his hand and his eyes closed, for the entire duration of the vigil services (8 to 9 hours) right up to the time when he suffered a double hernia.

FATHER SILVESTER OF CONSTAMONITOU (+1960)

When they used to ask Father Silvester, for years the master of ceremonies (*typikarios*) at Constamonitou, why we can't equal today the ancient fathers in prayer, he would answer: "Prayer, and especially *inner prayer*, requires a pure heart. Just like copper won't stick to zinc if the latter hasn't previously been cleansed with acid, so the soul can't attain to God if it hasn't been purified of the passions."

FATHER PHILARETOS OF CONSTAMONITOU (+1965)

Having come from America, where he had gone as a refugee, Father Philaret arrived on Mount Athos on the day of the liberation of Thessalonica (October 26, 1912). He traveled on foot to the Holy Mountain and, at his last stop, just before entering the village of Gomati, he left all his money with a widow to enable her to marry off her daughter. He wanted to become a monk at the Great Lavra. But, on passing by Constamonitou, he told himself: "It's here that I'm to stay!" He did indeed stay there, for many years, becoming abbot and experiencing the numerous testings which sanctified him. When his brother learned where he had gone to live as a monk, the former left his village in a hurry to bring him back to the world. But, while spending his first night at Constamonitou, Saint Stephen, the patron of the monastery, threatened him in a dream: "Leave here quickly, or else I'll thrash you. He is my child whom you've come to take away. From this time forward he belongs to me."

Ordained priest, Father Philaret wanted to serve the Divine Liturgy daily, in spite of his double hernia. In order to prepare himself, he would spend the night on his feet, resting his hernia against the back of a chair.

One winter's day, as he was making his way—the snow up to his waist—to the hermitage of Saint Antony in order to celebrate the Liturgy there, the flask containing the wine necessary for the sacrifice mysteriously broke itself, three times, at the same place on the road to the hermitage. Nothing troubled, Father Philaret clambered three times up the difficult ascent to the monastery, all the while saying: "Satan, your trickeries will not succeed. You've broken it, but the Liturgy will take place." For the fourth time he took wine from the monastery and finally arrived, blue with cold, at the hermitage, where the fathers celebrated on learning of his victory over temptation.

One day, seeing him seated on a chair after Compline, a monk said to him:

"Elder, give me your blessing! Why are you so morose?"

"No temptation today, my child. God's abandoned me!"

During the afternoon, he had the habit of taking a walk to the neighboring hermitage of the Holy Trinity in order to light the vigil lamps there. From spring to autumn he would be accompanied by a pair of swallows who had attached themselves to him. One day, as he was seated by the hermitage and saying the Jesus Prayer, he slipped imperceptibly into sleep. Suddenly, he was awakened by the blows of the sharp beak of one of the swallows. He opened his eyes and saw a viper which had climbed up his leg and reached his chest. God had thus saved him through the intermediary of his friends, the birds.

FATHER B– OF GREAT LAVRA

In June of 1983 Father B– was sent to the island of Skyros to inspect the monastery properties there. As soon as he arrived in the village, the villagers surrounded him: they demanded that he help them defend the Truth against an evangelical preacher who was disturbing them greatly by attacking the faith of the Church regarding the veneration of the saints and the Mother of God, and using abundant citations from the

Bible to support his case. Simple and almost illiterate, the poor monk was quite embarrassed. He thought it over a little. Then, remembering something that he had often read in the lives of the saints, he threw down the following challenge to his adversary: "Let us light a big fire in the village square, and let each of us walk into it. God will then reveal which of us speaks the truth." Very early the next morning, the villagers very excitedly gathered wood and made a big stack of it in the square. Father B– came, but the preacher had disappeared. He had in fact taken the first boat out that morning. The whole village celebrated delightedly this striking victory of Orthodoxy over the trumperies of human teachings. On his return to the monastery, they asked Father B–, "Were you really ready to walk into the fire?" He answered simply: "As for me, I have no doubt in the faith of the Church, and I told myself then: 'Worthless sinner that you are on this earth, you're good for nothing except for hell. Burn here or burn forever, it's all the same. Let's walk into the fire!'" Thus, by means of his deep humility, this simple monk upheld the faith like the martyrs and confessors of old.

FATHER ABIMELECH OF LITTLE SAINT ANNE'S (+1962)

Father Abimelech lived many years in a cave near Little Saint Anne's and fell asleep in the Lord at the patriarchal age of 105 years. When they used to ask him: "Elder, what have you been doing here all this time?" he would answer: "Here, my child, on these rocks, we keep watch over the mind [νοῦς] in vigil."

FATHER PETER OF THE CAVE OF ST. PETER, THE ATHONITE (+1962)

When old Father Peter was plunged in *prayer of the heart,* he used to be quite bathed in a light that one could see with one's bodily eyes. Some monks, coming stealthily up to his cave, could hear him groaning: "Oh my Christ! Pierce me, I pray you, with the thorn of your compassion!" Utterly poor, and detached from every earthly thing, he spent his life doing "violence" to himself beyond the possibilities of nature.

FATHER AUGUSTINE THE RUSSIAN (+1965)

Toward the end of his life, Father Augustine lived alone in a hermitage dependent on the monastery of Philotheou. He used to observe a very strict daily fast which his great simplicity had inspired in him. On feast days, when the Church prescribes a dispensation for oil, he would take a feather, dip it lightly in oil, and sign with a cross the two biscuits he had prepared from flour and water. Then he would put them in the oven saying: "Today, a dispensation for oil!"

Certain rough laymen, knowing his simplicity, would come freely to his cell and, even in his presence, take for themselves whatever the monastery had given him. The blessed one used to allow them to do this. Smiling, he would make no word of protest.

He had a great love for every man, and every time he met anyone—whether monk or layman—he would make him a deep bow. "He carries the grace of Holy Baptism," he would say whenever someone asked why he did this.

He overflowed with charity even for animals. Little by little, he transformed the enclosure of his hermitage into a hospice for elderly and ailing animals: asses and mules that were blind, lame, moribund, sick, or otherwise useless. The workers would open his gate and let such animals in without asking him. The good old man would then take loving care of them. He used to go and cut fresh grass and store it for winter's provisions, for his "disciples," as he used to call them. When the fathers of the monastery saw how weak he had become, they suggested that they take him to the monastery infirmary. Father Augustine answered, "I can't leave my mules." Finally, he accepted.

At night, he had no need of a kerosene lamp. "God gives me another light," he used to say, "and I can see more clearly than during the day." In his simplicity, he believed that everyone could see, just like he could, the uncreated light of God. One day, the eve of the Annunciation—the patronal feast of the monastery—monks and laymen were busy polishing the monastery's brass. Suddenly, Father Augustine appeared, radiant, quite transformed with the divine presence.

"Bless me, holy fathers!" he said, making his usual prostration.

"Say, how are you, Father Augustine?"

"I want to confide a thought to you. You must tell me if I am experiencing an illusion. This night, all night, there was a lot of light. One could see clearly, just like daylight, from Caracallou to Stavronikita. I could pick out the least detail. Was this, maybe, an illusion?"

One of the workers, mocking the old man, replied: "But, dear father, it was a sputnik. It fell from the sky into your cell and lit everything up."

Reassured, Father Augustine thanked him, and took his leave.

When he was bedridden in the infirmary, he used often to shout: "The holy angels are coming, there! there! Don't you see them?" And he would wake up the elderly monks sleeping next to him and shake them. Then, a little later: "The saints are here! The All-Holy Mother of God!" And he would again awaken the other invalids. The infirmarian used to reprimand him severely, saying, "Won't you stop this? You're deluded. Who is someone like you that the saints should come visit you?" Every day it was like that. When Father Augustine finally passed away, his face suddenly lit up, blindingly, three times. The infirmarian then understood his error, and exclaimed: "Now, I am sure this one was a saint!"

FATHER TIKHON OF KAPSALA (+1968)

Father Tikhon came from Russia to the Holy Mountain in 1918. His great love for *hesychia*, and for asceticism led him to the formidable area of Karoulia, where there lived at this time a great number of Russian ascetics. He stayed there for fifteen years, in a cave above the sea. Subsequently, he moved to Kapsala, not far from the monastery of Stavronikita.

He would only eat once every three days, often even only once a week. For the feast of the Nativity, he would purchase a herring and eat a little bit each day until the eve of Theophany, during the twelve days when the Church prescribes a dispensation of fish. He used to keep the rest of the fish throughout the remainder of the year and, on those occasions when he celebrated a Feast of the Lord or of the Mother of God, he would dip it in water, then hang it up again over the stove. That

is why, whenever someone praised his asceticism, he would say: "How so? Me? I gorge myself on fish-soup."

By this asceticism, together with a great humility, he acquired the gift of unceasing prayer, even during his sleep. "Whenever one prays," he used to say, "the prayer must unite with the heart just like you join two different things together with glue."

He would also say: "Before beginning any activity, you have to pray to God, saying: 'My God, give me strength and enlighten me," and at the end: 'Glory to God.'"

His eyes poured out a constant torrent of tears. He would wipe them with the help of a piece of damp tissue which he was always carrying about in his hand. His epitrachelion stayed continually damp with his tears, and the wood of the cross that he used to bless with had long been warped by them. He used to say that we must bathe the feet of Christ with our tears every day, and wipe them with our hair while prostrating ourselves on the ground.

When Father Tikhon celebrated the holy Liturgy in the chapel of his hermitage, he would often interrupt himself at the moment of the Great Entrance during the Cherubic Hymn. He would then ask the monk who served as his chanter to leave, and, entering into ecstasy, become a stranger to everything earthly. At the end of a half hour, realizing he had interrupted the Liturgy, he would take up again—very slowly—the celebration. It thus required two to three hours for him to complete it. When someone asked him what had happened, he would answer in his bad Greek:

"Guardian angel take me above... Guardian angel take me back down again..."

"And what did you see?"

"Angels, Archangels, Cherubim, Seraphim... Heavenly choir... thousands... ten thousands..."

THE TWO RUMANIANS OF KAPSALA, PHILARET AND BARTHOLOMEW

These two saintly old men lived for many years in one of the hermitages of Kapsala, the "desert" close to Karyes. The Elder, Philaret, was more advanced in age. Devotedly he served his disciple, Bartholomew, who was younger and completely paralyzed. And, in addition to his own rule of prayer, Philaret would do that of his disciple as well. When age and a hernia made his prostrations difficult, he would make use of a cane to help him rise after every bow to the ground.

Whenever anyone brought a gift to them, Father Philaret would ask simply: "How much did it cost?" And for every drachma the gift had cost, he would say a prayer rope of 100 knots for the sake of his benefactor. However, the time came when he no longer had the strength to offer prayers in this accordance with the cost of the gift. It was only at that time that the fathers learned of his struggle and extreme labors, and they stopped telling him the price of their presents.

After the death of his Elder, Father Bartholomew spent his last days in the infirmary of Stavronikita. One evening, the infirmarian found him standing up and full of life at the gate of the monastery. "Where were you? How did this happen?," he asked uneasily. The old man replied, smiling: "A beautiful lady came to me in the infirmary. She took me to Iviron to venerate Our Lady of the Gate, then she brought me to the scete of Lakkou to greet my friends, and brought me back here."

Father Bartholomew gave up his soul to God in peace a little later (1982).

FATHER ENOCH, THE RUMANIAN OF KAPSALA (+1980)

Old Father Enoch, wandering hermit of the region of Kapsala, was well known by all the Athonites. Of extreme poverty, he did not even wear shoes and, in winter, bound his feet in old cloths. He wore clothes so dirty and worn that, in seeing him approach, one could mistake him for the most repelling of creatures. Yet, as soon as one saw him clearly,

with his radiant face and a regard as pure as a baby's, one understood immediately that he possessed another kind of nobility, another sort of wealth.

A journalist, meeting him on the road, once asked him:

"What is monasticism?" Old Enoch replied:

"A monk is like a dog begging a crust of bread. If you give it to him, you do him a kindness. But if you chase him away with a kick, you do him an even greater kindness."

FATHER G– OF THE "DESERT" OF THE SOUTH

One winter, this old man fell ill and found himself completely isolated. When someone knocked at his door, he didn't answer. The fathers in the neighborhood grew uneasy, and one of them forced the old man's door. He was expecting to find him dead. Instead, he found him quite alive, though lying down.

"Give me your blessing, Father. How are you? I've come to see you." The old man answered with a tone of affliction:

"Oh my dear, how much better it would have been if you had not come! As soon as you came in, you chased away the angel. That's why I wasn't opening the door to anyone."

FATHER CHRISTODOULOS OF KATOUNAKIA (+1982)

Father Christodoulos was the disciple of the hesychast and master of inner prayer, Callinicus (+1930). He lived to the end of his days in a little house clinging to the rocky, precipitous slope of the Mountain, and was always ready to give generously of his teaching to any visitor. He used to say, for example: "The ancients who lived here in other times were men of great virtue and struggled mightily. Today, while we have at our disposal all the means of salvation, we still have no such accomplishments as theirs to offer to God. All we have left to bring us to salvation is patience."

FATHER ARETHAS

Father Arethas lived all his life as the obedient disciple of Papa Savvas the bookbinder, of the hermitage of Saint Charalampus at Karyes, close to the Church of the Protaton. After many ills, following a stroke, he was completely paralyzed. He was unable even to chase the flies away from his face and his tongue, too, was bound by the paralysis. However, he never lost the sense of complete and spontaneous obedience to his elder. While the two old men were thus only able to communicate with each other by eye signals, still, when Papa Savvas wanted to show someone the power of the mystery of obedience, he would clap his hands and say: "Come, Arethas, sing a song for our Mother!" Immediately the tongue of the disciple would be loosed, and he would begin to sing in a sweet voice either the "More honorable than the Cherubim..." or the "It is truly meet..." Following the hymn, he would fall back again into paralysis.

FATHER SYMEON, THE MAKER OF INCENSE (+1975)

Father Symeon lived in the cave where Father Joseph the Hesychast and his disciples had stayed sometime before. It is close to Little Saint Anne's. One day, a young monk, newly arrived on the Holy Mountain, came to pay him a visit. The old man expressed his joy on seeing so many new monks come in recent years to follow the way of the saints. He said to his visitor:

"Before all, Brother, hide no thought from your spiritual father. Have complete trust in him. Otherwise, you risk having happen to you what happened to me."

"What did happen to you?" asked the young monk.

"Having left the world and been made a rasophore [the first level of monasticism], I wanted to become a hesychast right away, to live in complete detachment and immersed in prayer just like the great Fathers of the past. That's how I came to be here, in this dry and difficult place, in spite of the advice of the elders and, in particular, of my spiritual father,

Papa Menas. Seeing my insistence, he finally said to me: "'Go then, since you insist on it. But come to see me regularly to confess your thoughts.'

"The distance between our two cells was only twenty minutes. One day, after completing my rule of prayer, as I was seated on my wooden bed, I heard the voices and laughter of women. A little later, I saw at my window four young women looking at me. My spirit was troubled: "'Bah! Where am I, at Piraeus or on the Holy Mountain?' They began to laugh even louder. The first one said:

"'He's pretty good-looking, this one.'

"'You idiot,' said the second, 'he's come here to be a monk. I'd like to marry him myself.'

The third one interrupted:

"'No, you're ugly. I'm the one who'll get him.'

"'You're wasting Your time,' said the fourth, 'because he's going to die in forty days without even becoming a great habit [the final grade of monk].'"

"And they disappeared. Then I started to grieve, afraid at the perspective of my approaching death. However, I didn't think of submitting this experience to the discernment of my confessor. Instead, on the fortieth day, I was waiting in terror for midnight to come. I wept to myself, and cried: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me! Forgive me, Lord, I haven't even had the time to become a great habit... ' The twelve strokes of midnight rang out. I was sure I was going to die. Nothing. I pinched myself, to make sure I was still alive, and realized that I had been the plaything of an illusion. So, I got up right away and ran to my confessor."

FATHER ARSENIUS OF DIONYSIOU (+1983)

Father Arsenius, originally from Pontus, arrived on the Holy Mountain after having made a pilgrimage on foot to Jerusalem. He was the faithful and humble companion in asceticism of Father Joseph the Hesychast (see below), and, in spite of his great austerity and his ever-present concern that he remain vigilant in prayer, he was to his dying day a help, a comfort, a messenger of paschal joy to everyone who came to him. As much in the cave at Little Saint Anne's as in the infirmary at

Dionysiou—where he stayed many months—he always knew how to help his brothers with a kind word or anecdote.

An old man, who knew them both, once said: "When Father Joseph wept, the whole earth shook, as when God revealed himself on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod. 20), but the tears of Father Arsenius were like "the dew of Hermon" (cf. Ps. 133:3).

One newly-tonsured monk came to receive the blessing of Father Arsenius while the latter was lying in the infirmary. The young man also asked the elder for a saving word. The old man replied:

"When the roof of a house has a hole in it, the rain falls in the inside and, when the foundation of the house is uncertain, it doesn't take long for the building to collapse. So with you, you must found your monastic life on obedience and complete its building with holy humility."

"And regarding love, Elder, don't you have anything to say?" asked the young monk.

"Oh, to be sure," he answered smiling, "the Holy Fathers have had quite a lot to say on that score." And then he fell silent.

How better, indeed, to honor holy charity than by silence?

Father Arsenius feel asleep in the Lord on September 2, 1983.

FATHER GABRIEL OF DIONYSIOU

Father Gabriel, former abbot of Dionysiou, fell asleep in peace on October 25, 1983, on the eve of his ninety-ninth year. A monk of Mount Athos for over 69 years and abbot for over a half century, he was the representative of the Holy Mountain in all its relations with the Greek government. At times of crisis for Athos he was resorted to as, effectively, supreme authority for the Mountain by the Athonites themselves, by the hierarchy of the Church, and by the government. Strong and forceful as a lion, he was, in fact, considered as the "Abbot of the abbots," as the father of all the Athonites, and as "grandfather" by all the young monks who, over the past fifteen years, have come to Athos. Most of these youngsters came, at the time of their beginning the ascetic life, to receive the blessing of the "grandfather" and to ask his sage advice.

In 1982 a young monk came to pay him a visit at the infirmary of Dionysiou where he was lying in the bed next to Father Arsenius. After having given his blessing, the patriarch of the Athonites said to the young monk:

"Come, dear Father, this is the last time that we shall see each other. I am departing."

"No, Elder, I'll come to see you again."

"You won't have time for it. I'm dying."

"If you depart this life, the All-Holy Mother of God will surely receive you with open arms. For, look, you've served her 'garden' faithfully for seventy years."

The old man looked at him with tears in his eyes:

"My child, we judge altogether too easily, we men. But God, He has His own judgment of us."

FATHER X–

In 1971, when another monk came to Father X– to complain that his elder, by all accounts a saintly man, had struck him for an involuntary disobedience, Father X– answered him:

"Well, look here! Tell me, oh crucified one, when did you come down from the cross? Who taught you that grace would come to you without human error?"

A professor asked Father X–:

"How can we, lay people, pray the 'Jesus Prayer'? We haven't got the time."

"Don't say you haven't got the time," the elder replied. "What is required is the proper disposition. Take, for example, when you get up in the morning: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy me...* when you wash: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me...* when you sit down for breakfast: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me...* when you get into your car to go to work: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.* Do you have time or not?"

A monk of a monastery complained to Father X– that he did not feel in himself any *transformation*, in spite of his long cultivation of the Jesus prayer:

"Nothing at all, Elder, nothing at all!"

"Well, what do you want then?" the elder replied. "To make the mountains move, or become all of a sudden another Saint Antony?"

"But I don't even understand the meaning of the prayer."

"Maybe you don't understand, but the devil—who hears it clearly—understands very well, and fears it. So, repeat the prayer and don't try to invent experiences."

Father X– predicted to his disciples ten days in advance the earthquake that struck Thessalonica in June, 1978. Immediately after the panic created by this catastrophe many believers in the area came to Mount Athos to ask the fathers prayers. A famous professor of the University paid a call on Father X– at his humble house in the southern part of the Mountain together with a group of students.

"Elder, why are you staying here? The world is on fire in Thessalonica. Heretics and politicians are leading souls astray every day. Take your staff, therefore, and go to the great plaza of Aristotle and save thousands of souls—like a new Saint Cosmas of Aitolia."

"My dear Professor," the monk replied, "I know that if I took my staff to preach at the plaza of Aristotle I could attract thousands of souls right away. But I also know, however, that I would no longer be Father X– of the "desert" of Athos. Let each of us remain therefore in the condition to which God has called him (1 Cor. 7:20). The monk teaches through his silence."

Another time he said: "It is by experience that I learned that obedience gives birth to prayer. One day, as I was busy at my manual work, the making of stamps for prosphora, my spirit [*nous*]* found itself suddenly ravished by God. At that moment, my elder called me: 'Hey! Father X–, put a little more wood on the fire.' I knew how rare and how brief are such ecstasies of the spirit, and so I answered him: "I haven't got the time!" Well, do you know how much I paid for that disobedience? For a very long time I could make no more spiritual progress."

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*_Nous_ (νοῦς) expresses ideas conveyed by the English words *mind, soul, intellect,* and *spirit* has at times been translated using one of these words; elsewhere it has been left untranslated or supplied in square brackets following the English—ED.

A monk of New Scete one day paid a visit on Father X–. The latter wanted to give him several letters to mail and, when he could not find his pen, his visitor suggested his own.

"It's very nice!" said Father X–.

"Keep it," said his guest. "I'll get another one at Daphni for only six drachmas."

That same evening, having returned to New Scete, the monk was saying his prayers by the moonlight. Suddenly, he saw Father X–. The latter made him a deep bow and gave him back the pen, saying:

"Take it back, Father. I couldn't quiet my conscience because I took it without asking beforehand for a blessing from my elder." And he then left right away for his house, more than an hour and a half's walk away.

During the last years of his elder's life, when the old man was suffering from cerebral disintegration and consequent frequent lapses of memory, Father X– changed nothing about the absolute obedience that he had shown his elder from the time he had become a novice. Often, the old man would order him to say vespers or to set the table just after they had just finished the office or the meal. Without any objection, or any sign of impatience, Father X– would do as he was told.

After the death of his elder, he lived alone for several years. Eighteen young men, attracted by his spiritual reputation, asked him in succession to become his disciples. Each time he refused. It is only when Father I presented himself that Father X– received the inner assurance that this one was for him. "I do nothing," he says, "without receiving an inner assurance from God."

He also says: "Now that I have become, in my turn, an elder. I say to myself: 'Am I then a saint that our All-Holy Lady has given me these little angels as disciples?' And I bless the years that I spent in obedience. The disciple has nothing to do except say: "Father, bless!" and "May this be blessed!" He spends his whole life thus without worry. But the elder has to take care of everyone, and to conduct himself differently for each of his disciples in order to guide him properly on the way."

To those visitors who ask him how they can know whether or not they are progressing in the spiritual life, the same old man says: "My

spiritual father, Father J–, used to tell me: 'You'll know yourself when you've reached the first stage.' So I kept doing my manual work every day, and kept praying. One day a great surge of enthusiasm swept over me, so great that I felt as if the angels themselves were keeping me from joining Christ at that moment. 'Let me get to Jesus!' I shouted at them, 'let me pass, all you angels! It's Jesus that I want. I want to adore Him alone. Let no one stop me. Open me the way to my Jesus!... It's impossible to describe the intensity of that feeling. So I ran to my spiritual father and told him:

'Elder, this is it, I've reached the first stage!'

'No,' he answered, 'you haven't reached the first stage yet.' A little while later, during prayer. I felt my body become paralyzed and all my bones on the verge of breaking as a result of the tension of my spirit. 'Here, this must be the first stage!' I said to myself. But Father J sent me back again. Still later, I felt in my prayer a great calm, an immense sweetness. 'There you are!' the old man told me, 'you have gotten to the first stage of the spiritual ascent.' Like the prophet Elijah, I understood then that God is 'neither in the storm, nor in the earthquake, but in the little breeze (cf. 1 Kings 19). But, in order to understand this, you have to have lived it. That's why Father J never tried to go in front of me in order to lead me. Instead, he let me go ahead alone and then helped me afterwards to understand what I had experienced."

"Another time, while I was praying, saying 'most sweet Jesus...' tears came to me with an abundance I had never known before. I was quite bathed in tears, continually, for several days. These were neither the sorrowful tears of penitence, which I knew well, nor the burning tears of desire for God and of divine love, which I also knew from experience: these were different tears. 'These tears must be telling me something,' I told myself. A little later, I entered into a great ecstasy. I felt that the fullness of the Heavenly Kingdom was contained within me. And I heard then a voice in my innermost depths saying: 'As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you'

(Isa. 62:5). I reported this to Father J–. He answered:

'From now on, each time that you feel this spiritual state return, you will no longer say *Most sweet Jesus* while praying, but *Jesus, my bridegroom.*' Do you understand," Father X– concluded, "how one progresses in the spiritual life? By experience. You have to learn to discern the different spiritual states. Just as someone passes from primary school to high school and then to the university, and the lessons given at the higher level are incomprehensible to the student at the lover levels, and those of the lower become useless for the one who has already learned them, just so is it in the life of prayer."

The same elder once said: "All the trees that I planted, not by my own efforts but at the behest of my spiritual father, blossomed and gave fruit. But all those which did not conform to the will of the Elder produced nothing."

DIFFERENT FATHERS

One old man said: "When I was young and in the world everyone called me 'the monk'. I finally told myself: 'Since you're a 'monk,' what are you doing still in the world? The world is for the worldly. So, go on then to the Holy Mountain.' And that's how I came here."

Another old man said: "The monk is like a sly little fish. He knows how to avoid the world like the fish knows how to escape the bait that hides the deadly hook."

Father Z– suffered continually from different illnesses. However, he endured it with joy, and said: "I suffer, but I ask for no cure. The other day I said to the Lord: 'I don't ask you to cure me, but to give me patience. And if one day it happens that I do ask you for health, then I'll know that I'm not doing well at all.' The spiritual man, even when he finds himself at death's door, will say that he's fine. The worldly man—well, he has a different logic."

The same old man said: "The one who loves God, loves not only men, his brothers, but loves as well all of nature since it is God's blessing. Someone will rush to get a piece of the clothes or of something else that belonged to a saint, and kiss it devoutly, because he knows he receives from it the saint's blessing. It's the same with nature's trees, grasses,

flowers—everything is God's blessing. We embrace all of it with the same rush of love, especially those fruits that nourish us."

Another old man said: "Above everything, Satan wants to keep us from praying. As soon as someone sets out to pray, he tries to scatter his concentration with different thoughts and fantasies. If that doesn't succeed, then he appears himself, solely in order to trouble us and interrupt, if only for a moment, our prayer. One day, as I was falling on my knees to pray, a violent burst of light came from behind me—just like a powerful projector—and lit up the whole area. I understood that this came from Satan. So, I paid it no attention and continued my prayer without troubling myself about it. Next, two little demons appeared to my left a few yards away. They were playing around and cutting capers to make me laugh. But, I paid them no more attention than the projector, and so succeeded in defeating this particular test."

When someone once asked this famous elder if there still exist any hidden ascetics on the Holy Mountain, he answered: "Yes, there are still many ascetics worthy of the ancient Fathers who live secretly. On the Saturday of the Akathistos [two weeks before Easter] in 1982, for example, when we had just come from celebrating the holy liturgy here, in this house, and while I was preparing a light meal for the fathers, I found, squeezed into a corner, a monk of my acquaintance who whispered to me in a barely audible voice: 'Please, a little bread and some olives... ' He appeared to be in state of extreme emaciation. 'Of course, dear brother, here's a little rice pilaf. We've just made it. Eat some! And tell me the truth, when was the last time you ate?' he answered:

"'Since the Sunday of Meat-Fare' (that is, six weeks earlier). Do you see, such deeds are accomplished on Athos even in our days."

The same old man said recently, "It is a blessing of the All-Holy Mother of God that her "Garden" flourishes again in our time. Only, you have to take care, you young monks, to stay as faithful as possible to your monastic vocation. You have to have a solid foundation, because the monks to come will be weak and will need support. The lay people, too, will look for help from you. If you have no lived experience of Grace, how will you be able to help them? God is preparing here something

great. The Church is at present in the trough of a wave. The world is in a deep crisis, and people have an intense thirst for spiritual realities."

Another old man said: "The spiritual Father, I met him in prayer, climbing to heaven like a burning column of fire. Do you understand what a deep mystery is hidden there?"

Another old man said: "The monk is like Moses who asked God to show him His glory (cf. Exod. 33). God answered him that no one could see His face, that is, the divine essence. But, He will show him favor by telling him to hold fast to the *rock* of the faith and to plunge into his cell, like the prophet in the *cleft of the rock*. He will stay there in the darkness, bearing with patience difficulties, boredom, afflictions, dryness in prayer, as one covered by the hand of God. And, from time to time, the Lord will remove his hand, will spread his fingers, to illumine the monk with splendor of His *back*, that is, with the uncreated energy of the Holy Spirit."

The same old man said: "The monk doesn't study the dogmas, he lives them. When he meditates on Holy Scripture, or the writings of the Holy Fathers, he isn't looking to acquire some kind of knowledge, but he is learning the grammar of that language within whose ineffable words God comes to speak to him in prayer."

The same said: "How can we ask of God that we *see* Him? Rather, we are to present ourselves naked before Him, stripped of every care, of every attachment to the world, to ourselves, to our thoughts, or even to our discipline, and to ask Him thus to look upon us. It is then that God's looking upon us will become for us the *vision* of Him."

He also said: "The monk is the one who keeps himself every moment before the invisible God as if He were visible."

He also said: "The Lord will only come visit us when we are deprived of every human consolation, whether that be voluntarily, through asceticism, or involuntarily, through trials and sickness."

He said again: "The beginning of the spiritual life for the monk is the renunciation of everything visible and invisible, save only God."

FATHER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST (+1959)

Father Joseph the Hesychast is one of the most striking Athonite personalities of this century. Thanks to his disciples who transmitted and applied his teaching and his way of life to ever-growing communities, he can justly be considered the principal author of the present restoration of the tradition of the *prayer of the heart.*

Coming to Athos at the age of twenty-three, nourished by the accounts of the great ascetics of earlier times, he looked immediately for a spiritual father who would teach him the *science of sciences.* But he could find no one at all. After a brief stay at Katounakia with an ascetic, he came to rest with Father Arsenius (see above), his faithful companion in asceticism, in a wretched hut at the scete of Saint Basil. In fact, the two stayed at the hut only during the coldest months of winter; the rest of the year—for about ten years—they spent in rocky caves in the cliffs of Athos, sustaining themselves with a little dry bread and devoting all their time to prayer.

Father Joseph never allowed himself any relaxation in his asceticism, in spite of a deplorable state of health that brought him little by little to a condition of semi-paralysis. Since, however, his younger disciples could not endure the austerity of the caves, he decided at last to move his community to a more accessible place, New Scete. It is there that, a little later, he gave his soul back to God—a true martyr. Throughout his life, because of his sacrifice, God accorded him many spiritual gifts: visions of light, appearances, clairvoyance and discernment of thoughts. After his death, the Holy Spirit bore witness to His presence in breathing from his remains a sweet perfume.

We present here a few stories from his life as they have been reported by his disciples, some of whom are still living:

At the beginning of his sojourn on Athos, not having found a spiritual father, Father Joseph lived for some time close to the cave of Saint Athanasius the Athonite, a short distance from Great Lavra. There he led a very austere life, and once succeeded in standing for eight days while neither eating nor sleeping. He used to say, "No ascetic practice

brings so many blessings as the deprivation of sleep. Truly, vigil dissolves the body."

During this period, in spite of all his efforts, he could not get past the stage of vocal prayer. As soon as he would stop repeating aloud "*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me...* ," his concentration would break up in different thoughts. One day, as he was looking toward Athos to ask the Mother of God to help him in his distress, he saw suddenly a flash of light, accompanied by a violent wind, burst forth from the chapel of the transfiguration which is located on the peak of the mountain. The radiance bent in an arc from its point of origin directly to Father Joseph, penetrating right to his heart: "I immediately felt altogether transformed. I was filled with light and could no longer feel whether I had a body or not. At that point, the prayer began to repeat itself in my heart with the steadiness and regularity of a clock." He re-entered his cave and sat down, his chin upon chest, to follow the prayer in his heart. But then he was carried off in ecstasy. He felt he had found himself transported to heaven, to a place where there reigned an indescribable calm and peace. One thought alone came to him "Oh God, make it so that I never return to the world, but stay here always, with you." From that time on the prayer never stopped resonating in his heart.

When he met his companion in asceticism, Arsenius (+1983) on the day of the feast of the Transfiguration on the summit of Athos, he told him: "You're the one I've been looking for!" Arsenius replied: "Me, too." They began to live together keeping throughout the week a strict fast and complete silence. Whenever they left the "desert" to go on foot to Karyes—about a ten-hour hike—they would walk over two hundred yards apart from each other in order not to talk. After quickly dealing with their business at Karyes, they would return the same way they had come—without even taking water or the least offer of food. On returning to the hut at Saint Basil, they would say: "Through love for Christ, let us eat today!"

One feast day, Father Arsenius left in order to take part in the service at a neighboring house. Father Joseph preferred to remain in the hut to avoid any distraction. "All that evening," he recalled, "I had the

insistent thought that all the other fathers were going to take communion while I, because of my sins remained unworthy of it. While I was seated trying to concentrate on the prayer, this idea wouldn't go away. It kept increasing in me an intense desire for the Bread of life. I was blaming myself for such distraction when, suddenly, I sensed a presence close to me. I opened my eyes and there, in the darkness, I saw an angel whose radiance filled the whole place with light, light as of another world. He held in his hand a sparkling vase. He opened it carefully, approached me and made me communicate of the Body of the Lord with fear and great devotion. Then he looked at me with a modest smile, closed the vase, and ascended to heaven through the roof as he had come. My heart burned with love for Christ, such that nothing worldly came to trouble me."

His love for the Mother of God and his confidence in her were limitless. He once said: "When I was in the cave near Little Saint Anne's, the temptations and afflictions would multiply, and my sole consolation was our holy Mother. One day, I went to our little chapel where this little icon was once [the icon that he wore always]. I stood in prayer before her, asking and crying out: 'Come quickly to help me, O compassionate one, because you can do so whenever you want... ' I then saw the icon shine with a blinding light, then the face of the Mother of God increased to life-size. It was no longer an image, but the Virgin Queen herself who was present. She held the Lord in her arms, a suckling child, and said in a voice sweeter than honey, more fragrant than perfumes:

"'Haven't I told you to put your trust in me? Why are you so discouraged? Here, take Christ!' Our most sweet Jesus then extended His hand and caressed, three times, my brow and head. My soul filled immediately with light, and with a boundless love, so much so that I could no longer remain standing. I fell on the ground and kissed devoutly the place where the Queen of the world had stood."

He said once more: "The most fearsome form of the passion of sleep is when Grace retires from us, and when negligence and obscurity take hold of us, not letting the least consolation shine through... One day, I was roughly tested by this passion. I was struggling not to give way and

was nearly at the end of my strength. Then I interrupted my struggle to cry to the Lord with tears: 'Lord, are they going to overcome me?' Immediately, I heard a soft voice deep within me: 'Will you not endure even this for love of me?' My sorrow disappeared suddenly like a cloud vanishes before the sun, and, tears in my eyes, I jumped with joy like a child: 'Yes, Lord, for you! Come and help my weakness!'"

Concerning the divine light, Father Joseph said: "Compared to the divine light, the light of the world—even the noon-day sun—is only darkness. A strange thing: at that time there takes place a communion, a union of the Infinite and Uncreated with men who are created and limited. By His energies, the latter are truly transformed into *gods and sons of the Most High.* It is then alone that man can understand, and be assured in all his being, that he is the image and likeness of God Himself. Every limitation of time and of space disappears. He soars above duration and space, and finds himself immersed in peace. He feels that he has become like God in Whom he participates by grace of His energies. He feels that he is god in the bosom of God, without knowing how this has come to pass or to what degree. He forgets everything about his former state and his origins. He knows only God Who envelopes him, and how sweet He is. He no longer doubts, is no longer astonished, no longer searches out meaning, but rejoices fully in a measureless happiness that no longer seems strange to him, but rather something which is proper and natural."

So it is that, day after day, for a thousand years, the angels have not stopped inscribing in the book of heaven the wonderful actions of the servants of God.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Amen.

Part Four

The Spiritual Father

> Ask your father and he will show you: Your elders, and they will tell you.
>
> —*Deuteronomy 32:7*

READERS OF DOSTOYEVSKY will be familiar with the spiritual father in Orthodox tradition, at least as this figures in the characters of the Elder Zossima in the *Brothers Karamazov* and the venerable Bishop Tikhon who, in some versions of *The Possessed*, hears the life confession of the atheist Stavrogin. The Russian novelist's characters are fictional, but—as scholars such as Nadezhda Gorodetsky and John Dunlop have shown[1]—he was writing from his own experience, both personal and literary.[2] As we noted in the "Introduction" above, the phenomenon of the charismatic elder is one that is well attested in the history of the Orthodox Church. We also spoke about the appearance in recent years of a group of such gifted men on Mount Athos. It is our great good fortune to present in the talks and lectures following the words of one of those men.

Archimandrite Aemilianos (Vapheides) is the abbot of the Monastery of Simonos Petros. He is also the founder of one of the largest women's monasteries in modern Greece and the overseer of three daughter monasteries, one for men and two for women, in France. A native of Athens, the child of refugees from Asia Minor, he was educated in the university of the Greek capital. Following the completion of his studies, he was attached to the staff of the late bishop of Trikkala in Thessaly, Dionysius, who ordained him both deacon and then priest, and who later commissioned him to begin the re-establishment of monastic life in the monasteries of the Meteora. The latter, whose buildings perched atop enormous pillars of weathered sandstone comprise one of the miracles of medieval architecture, were largely deserted. Over a period of

some ten years as abbot of the Monastery of the Transfiguration, Great Meteora, Father Aemilianos gathered about himself a community of young monks drawn chiefly from the neighboring towns and, at the same time, directed the beginnings of the women's community (including very often the sisters and cousins of the young men at the monastery) that would grow to become the Monastery of the Annunciation at Ormylia, presently the home of over one hundred sisters. Following the death of the bishop who had sponsored the community's beginnings, and owing to the pressures of tourists who came to see the Meteora, the young brotherhood accepted an invitation from the aging community of Simonos Petros on Athos and moved to the Holy Mountain in July of 1973. It has since grown to include over sixty monks and, as well as a majority of Greek nationals, counts among its family men from the United States, Canada, England, France, Germany, and Australia. Thanks to its abbot and the atmosphere of prayer and welcome that he fosters, the fame of the monastery has spread widely over the past eighteen years throughout Greece, the Orthodox world, and beyond to Western Europe and the New World.

Why? How is it that one man, beginning alone and living for all intents and purposes as a hermit for several years, becomes the abbot and director of hundreds of monastics, the spiritual father of thousands more in the "world," and an increasingly important factor in the renewal of an entire local church, Greece, and through the latter of the Orthodox world? Father Aemilianos was quite alone when he began, and his first monks did not join him until he had lived for some years by himself on top of his lonely rock. This writer, who has had the inestimable joy and privilege of living within his monastery and of receiving his care and counsel, would venture the following reply: this happened through the power of God's Holy Spirit, through obedience, and through prayer. Let us take each of these in turn.

"Through the Holy Spirit": There is nothing new in the history of the Church about the phenomenon this abbot represents. From the patriarchs to the prophets, from the apostles to the great monastic saints of the Church in every generation, the Holy Spirit has called some to serve

in special ways. Abraham was called to leave his father's land and kin to travel to an unknown country. Elijah and Elisha were called to wander the land because of the apostasy of God's people. The apostles were called to leave their livelihood and family to follow Christ. Saint Antony was called to leave his home and possessions and to journey alone into the terrible desert of Egypt. The examples are many. We have mentioned a number of them: Saints Sava of Serbia, John of Rila, Sergius of Radonezh, Paissy of Ukraine, Herman of Alaska, and the two saints of our own generation, Silouan and Joseph of Athos. All of them fall into the same pattern. They are called away from their native lands and the society of others. They leave alone and live alone for long periods, and their solitary lives come ultimately to touch and change the lives of thousands, ten thousands, and even millions of Christians. Occasionally through their teachings, and always by the example of their lives, they founded and revived whole churches, nations, and peoples. This is nothing more nor less than the power of the Spirit at work in His saints. One holy soul kindles others with the fire of God. The light of the Transfiguration illumining a single heart can and has changed the course of empires.

"Obedience": is a hard notion, but it is also a continuous theme in the lives of the saints. It involves the sacrifice of one's own will, one's preferences, tastes, and pride. Father Aemilianos left the excitement and sophistication of his home city, the capital, to travel to Thessaly and to a rough-hewn population of farmers and shepherds whose dialect he sometimes could barely understand. He did so at the behest of his spiritual father, the late bishop, just as he later obeyed the latter's order to go alone to the Great Meteora, abandoned and alone on its pinnacle, and live there as a solitary in the faith that disciples would one day come. They did, but could he have known that when he left his apartment in town for the drafty emptiness of the ancient monastery? He could not, but he could and did obey. And there he waited... for years.

"Prayer": is the center of the Christian life, the "motor" of the saints, the "communion of the mind with God" according to the definition of Evagrius of Pontus, a fourth century writer on the spiritual life.[3] It is

also an effort that must engage us "to our last breath." Our own late twentieth century imaginations struggle with the ancient texts and the God-ravaged lives they describe. The lifelong fasting, the endless prostrations, the nights spent sleepless in vigil, the unending warfare with the frailties of the too-mortal flesh, with the tricks and slips of the mind and the traps of the devil—what modem heart does not quail at these enormities, so frightening, so alien? Yet this path to God is of proven worth. From Elijah in the wilderness, to the Forerunner, to Antony in his deserted fort, to Sergius in the forests and our own Herman on his island, it is the way of many of the greatest saints. Why did they do it? Because, as this writer once heard Father Aemilianos say to his monks, they would see God. Desire for the vision of God comes before everything else. It empowers the struggle for prayer and leads finally, in God, to God. This is a path worn deep by the traffic of the saints. It is also the way followed by the young abbot atop his stone pillar: alone with God Alone in winter snows and summer heat, hoping, enduring, and, at last, partaking of the Mystery of the Lord Jesus in glory.

Now we may speak of spiritual fatherhood. It is the product of all the above, of the call of the Spirit tested by obedience and forged in the crucible of prayer. What are its signs? The same Evagrius we quoted earlier summed up its virtues in two words, dispassion and love. The first means freedom from slavery to the passions, that is, from both the tyranny of the flesh and of the emotions.[4] In dealing with other people dispassion means primarily, so far as we understand it, the freedom to act without calculation based on one's own interests, a clarity of vision, a discernment unclouded by lust, anger, fear, or desire for power. Thus love is liberated in its turn to act, unstained and unstinting, as God acts: without sentimentality, not from self-interest, joyfully, truly, and unquenchably. To meet and converse with such a person is to have a genuine encounter with the love of God Himself, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the elder or spiritual father of the Orthodox Tradition: called by the Spirit, tested and proven in lonely struggles, and given back to the world by Christ as the sign and communion of His love for us.

It is not difficult therefore to understand why such people are rare, or why, when found, they must be regarded as singularly precious, true gifts of God's grace, and listened to with all attention. With these thoughts we leave the reader to the following texts and to the power of the Spirit at work in their author.

8

The Role of the Spiritual Father in an Orthodox Monastery

by Archimandrite Aemilianos,
Abbot of Simonos Petras

A MONASTERY is not a human society, rather it is the continuous assembly of the fraternity of the Church: in the refectory, and throughout the day.* It is an assembly that identifies itself with the path of the Church herself throughout the course of her history, one that reproduces the model of that fraternity constituted by Christ and His Apostles. Such a gathering is not composed only of its visible members, but as well of those who, in their turn, come to her to comprise the Church of the past and of the future. A monastery is thus a type of the Church in her entirety. It is the gathering of the Church herself, concentrated in a particular space. Consequently the spiritual father (*gerontas*), the abbot, is an image of God: he stands in the place of Christ while the other monks constitute the choir of the saints, living and dead.

The monastery is a mystery, a sacrament, and the spiritual father is the visible element of this mystery, behind whom hides the invisible: God, and everything that escapes the senses, which can only be sensed by the spirit.

This place, so important, of the spiritual father situated at the very heart of the mystery signifies thus that he is the guide, the one who takes and shapes men in order to gather them and incorporate them into the life of the Church, and of Christ. The superior thus does not concern himself only with food, with the daily life and material needs of the community. Before all, he is the guide of souls, the one who initiates

*Interview given for the film *Athos, 1,000 years are as a day*, produced in 1981 by the Suedwest Funk, Baden-Baden, West Germany.

them into the mysteries, who reveals to them the way to perfect mystical union with God.

One must understand that the monastery is a special kind of society. It is in fact the society of Paradise, the society of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the society of all the saints in which each believer—in this case, each monk—possesses an absolute right to the life of Christ, but where as well Christ Himself possesses the same rights over the life of each. The monastery comprises thus a most important reality because it preserves the rights man had before the Fall—the possibility of possessing God wholly as one's own. It is this reality that the abbot must, each day, make present and manifest to his monks, which is to say to the disciples of the Lord Himself.

He is therefore the master who transmits to them his own knowledge, and who, in particular, must reveal to them by his own life the knowledge of the true God, by the fire that he kindles in their hearts, by the awareness that he gives them in order that they themselves become sensitive to Christ as present, and also Christ as One Whom they await. Because, whatever his daily obedience, the monk's life is nothing other than the burning and impatient attendance upon God.

And, little by little, the father takes the monk in order to raise him up to the heights, to give him the grace of God. In the mystical life, it is grace that accomplishes all in such manner that Christ becomes not only the One to come, but the One with Whom we hold converse now. Thus the monk learns to devote himself to his master, the Lord, to have with Christ exactly the same intimacy as has the choir of the Apostles. And, finally, by grace of his daily effort and careful attention to the Holy Trinity, the abbot will be able to achieve another result: the monks will perceive God as living, as a contemporary, accompanying them on arising from sleep, at their regular tasks, and in the least detail. At that point the communion between God and men is complete.

The spiritual father is therefore, in fact, the same who takes his disciple, the monk, by the hand in order to introduce him to the Lord. He is the same who brings Christ down, who reunites that which was

separated—the realities of heaven and of earth—in order to transform them into the one, unique, and genuine dance.

Such is the real role of the spiritual father and such is the manner in which the monks perceive him. This is why this discipline exists, this obedience, this charity, this gift of self and this confidence that addresses itself not so much to the superior—who is only a man—but to Christ Whom he represents.

All the monks partake of this sense of the mystery and of the mystical reality that manifests itself among them: because the Elder is not merely someone who has appeared today for the sake of the monastery; rather, he proceeds from the stream of the Orthodox tradition, he springs from the living current of the Holy Spirit.

Of course he [the Elder] is a man, but the sense of his humanity gives way within the community of the monastery. Certainly he lives as a normal man, just as any other living man, but he is as well the one whom God has taken and set apart, and who in consequence no longer lives quite the life of the present world. While indeed he walks the earth, he senses in some manner that his head is in the sky, that he sees Heaven, that he sees God. This, here, is the most important thing a monastery can offer. This, indeed, is what contemporary man and his society most lack: the spiritual father who makes God so tangible, so powerful, so living, so intense, and so true.

The monastic community gathered around its spiritual father is thus the type of all the universal Church. Daily life is very simple there. But in the silence, the quiet, by grace of the unity and mutual charity, one is put on the lookout to listen for the rustling of the steps of Christ Who draws nigh.

9

Martyrdom: Foundation of Orthodox Monasticism

by Archimandrite Aemilianos

IF WE WERE TO ANALYZE the contents of a soul longing for retreat (*hesychia*), we would undoubtedly find in it several elements contributing to influence, form, and complete the monastic calling.* To mention a couple: 1) *repentance,* a yearning or need of the soul, a sense of the childishness, the falsity and shadowy meaning of things, of phenomena, of things desired—indeed, of our whole world which is nothing other than an image or recollection of another, truly existing realm; 2) the *love of God,* a preference for His Kingdom for the sake of which everything—when it is a matter of winning God for oneself—is reckoned as dust and loss, even those things that are holy and blessed by the Church as, for example, husband or wife, marriage and children, sharing in the Church's life, activity, and society in the world, preaching, almsgiving, the priesthood, in short all our conventions and obligations in society. Thus, for example, Saint Basil the Great forbids the monk to desire priesthood. Almsgiving is considered a great sin for the monk should he indulge in it. Preaching is seen as egoism.

So it is that monasticism is placed in an altogether different position than that which pertains to the rest of the body of the Church, in order to show that it comprises a transfer to a whole different world, to a different society. An inclination towards solitude, withdrawal, and estrangement (*xeniteia*), and the yearning for perfection and deification co-exist, come together in every soul that lives apart and longs for

*Talk given at the "Conference on Monasticism" convoked by the Archdiocese of Thessalonica, March, 1980, commemorating the 1700th year of the birth of the Great Martyr, Demetrius the Myrrh-flowing.

solitude. It would be quite possible for us to mention many other and varied such qualities which, with respect to their knowledge, formation and conduct, distinguish the character of the life and history of those who practice monasticism.

That one element, however, which is never lacking in any monastic vocation whatever, that which plainly, intensely, and wholly rouses and incites the whole being of him who longs for the monastic life, is the attitude of the martyr, the passion for suffering, his disposition to endure, suffer, sacrifice himself and die for the sake of his love for God, in order thus to express his soul's deepest impulses and its pursuit of the God for Whom it seeks without ceasing. We can say, then, that someone comes to monasticism in order to become a martyr, through much pain and effort, through tears and endurance (or, as one of our old Athonites would say, "many endurances"), to test himself with trials, "with far greater labors, with imprisonments, with countless beatings [by both demons and men], and often near death" (2 Cor. 11:23ff).

Martyrdom: Foundation of the Monastic Vocation

Why, though, is martyrdom a primal element of monastic life? I will mention just three reasons, out of the many, in order not to go beyond the time limits set for this talk.

The role of pain. At the beginning, after the Fall, man himself sensed and realized that what had appeared as a curse—namely, God's decision that he should live by the sweat of his brow, bear children with pain, and rediscover paradise "through many tribulations" (Acts 14:22)—hid what was in fact God's love, that it comprised a way and means for man's second creation, for his renewal who had fallen away and was dying. On maturing, man recognized in his sufferings, in his labor and sweat, and even in his death, that his pain encompassed a means of expression, a living possibility for his presenting and revealing himself to God, of confessing to Him his longing for the deification now lost. This is to say that he, man, found no better way of expressing his yearning for deification than by suffering pain for the sake of God.

Man, indeed, longs to become a god. But the one language capable of asking for his restoration to fellowship with God is the language of sacrifice, the fully vivid and living language of suffering for Christ, for the sake of God's Kingdom. Suffering thus becomes a necessary element of the human soul, innate, instinctive in it, the very stuff out of which we construct our relationship with God. It is out of sufferings, trials, and ordeals that the soul approaches God. It thus loves God the more, becomes more fully dependent on Him. Precisely for this reason we would say that, speaking "economically" (and according to the expression of Saint Gregory Nazianzus[1] and the lives of all the fathers), God does not heal the soul by any other method so much as by pain, by labor and travail, in order that He may give us life in exchange for our voluntary death.

Consequently, if there was never any possibility of birth pangs being absent in the soul that loves God, how much the more so this must apply to a vocation for monasticism, since the latter is a virginal childbirth in the bowels of the Spirit of salvation! So it is that the one who longs for the ascetic life takes no rest at any point along his way but, desiring his own perfection, engages in still greater exercises, in yet more grievous sufferings. His martyr's conscience is moved easily, readily, and with joy and thanksgiving to extremities of suffering, to whatever is required to win Christ for itself.

We thus see monks engaging in the most extreme activities. For example, saints who endeavor to go through the whole forty days of Lent without sleep and require an angel to threaten them in order to make them take food. We see Athonite monks eating a little fish bone in order to conform to the festal blessing for the eating of fish. We see monks, today as in the past, who day and night neither sit nor lie down until their feet swell up in protest—though, for all that, they suffer no harm. This is the natural impulse of the human being who is tasting the joy of sorrow, the spiritual (*not* the psychological) pleasure of pain. The same soul looks for pain in order, through it, to appear before God Whom it loves, in order to live out its love. We can in any case find this same phenomenon in the course of ordinary human experience.

Martyrdom. The Christian's spiritual roots, moreover, lead him on to martyrdom from the moment he begins to long for God and discerns monasticism within the "way of piety," the "philosophic life" of divine participation. And if this, his longing to express his love for God through suffering, comes to his soul early wrapped in as it were, "swaddling clothes," it nevertheless grows and becomes a giant in his living out of the monastic life. I mean that the spiritual roots of the Christian lead him inevitably to the love of suffering in martyrdom.

When He suffered and was martyred by His death on the Cross, Christ Himself became our "exemplar" (1 Pet. 2:21), and we have been made worthy of completing "what is lacking in His afflictions" (Col. 1:24), in His sufferings, by recalling and making them somehow present and contemporary in the Church as still productive of redemption, life and salvation.

Our Lord called Paul to be His Apostle (as He indeed called all the Apostles) by showing him all he had to suffer (Acts 9:16) and so demonstrating that Paul could not have been His Apostle and disciple without suffering for His sake. The Apostle always advances his sufferings as clear proof of his apostleship, of his sincerity and love for God. His sufferings thus comprise a grace setting the seal on his faith in Christ. Truly, we are not just called to believe in Him, but to suffer for Him as well. Consequently, suffering is that which somehow perfects our faith, perfects our human witness. We are otherwise incapable of loving God and serving Him.

The Apostles sealed their apostleship with a martyr's death: for example, James, the first to die, Andrew the first-called, and likewise the first deacon, Stephen. And the monk, according to Saint John of Sinai, is understood as "marching in the ranks of the first martyr."[2] Prior to the Apostles, John the Forerunner of the Lord, who according to Jerome was the prince of anchorites, had already been martyred, already followed the way of all the prophets before him. Those who in the Old Testament endured distress in mountains and caves and dens of the earth (cf. Heb. 11) became prototypes of the monks. They are, as it were, monks before the monks, and are praised by Scripture for having

spent their lives with the attitude and courage of martyrs. Eleazar is called a "holy man" when "he died nobly in his tortures" (4 Macc. 6:30). Like all Christians from the beginning the monk studies the Old Testament daily, reads the Psalter, is inspired to seek for God, and "for His sake is slain all the day long and accounted as a sheep for the slaughter" (Ps. 44:22). He is led to seek Him out with all his soul, which "thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:2), which means with a sharpness of pain, an unceasing martyrdom of yearning, an unremitting liquifaction of soul. Lacking God, his soul runs after Him like a hunter in order that it may appear to the Invisible God Who, to be sure, sees the tears that the monk eats as his bread day and night for His sake.

The believer reads daily in the Psalter about the mountains and wilderness rejoicing at the Face of God, the hills and wilderness "whence His help will come," and in Revelation about the woman—that is, the woman who represents the Church and every soul—who "gave birth to the male child" (Rev. 12:13ff) and was given "the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness," that wilderness which is called especially "her own place." So how could it be difficult for him to seek for God and dedicate himself to Him in order to appear before Him together with the mountains and the wilderness, to embrace the contests and strivings of the eremitic life, or to see this same wilderness as the place and mode of his own martyrdom?

From the very first moments of the Church's foundation in the world it was altogether natural for Christians, who desired knowledge of the Scriptures and the exactitude of evangelical Perfection and longed to take up the Cross of Christ and the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, to want to be included among the hermits of the wilderness. They wanted to be the virgins "who follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4) and isolate themselves from the very beginning, whether spatially or through their way of life, from the world and then later, by reason of their increase in love and maturity, from their very selves, in accordance with the saying of Saint Paul: "The world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

The monastic vocation is at once a state of mind in love with the eremitic life, and the consciousness of and love for martyrdom. These two are born and grow up together. We might picture them as the blossoms and natural fruit of the Gospel proclamation. As many as have the freedom to find and choose the "more direct" way of Christian life give themselves over to godly ascetic struggles for the sake of Christ. For this reason it was also quite natural that the Church—as soon as she had recognized in the fourth century the justice of monastic life, freedom and organization—should treasure the monks as her "elect" children and particularly interest herself in the thousands of such God-loving and noble athletes of Christ, showing every maternal concern for their way of life, which was an imitation of heaven, and providing every possibility for its development.

Therefore in its essence monasticism is very old. It dates from the very time that the Son bore witness to—was martyred for—the Father, or at the least, from the time that the Church of Christ was founded and the principles of the Cross and martyrdom prevailed in the fervent works of her members. The early Christians' spiritual roots and sources and traditions impelled them to a martyrdom that was to be accomplished locally, in mountains and caves and in monasteries. It impelled them in short to do what would be well-pleasing to God.

The monks as successors to the martyrs. The persecutions conducted by the Roman Empire contributed greatly to the development of the martyric principle in monasticism. The latter, especially in the East, had no other goals for itself other than the quest for, the discovery, knowledge, love of, and communion with God. It is thus that God is enabled somehow to converse with His creature. For example, in the witness of the Old Testament He demands of Job: "Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you and you shall declare to me" (Job 38:3). A man who is cowardly and takes comfort in what is easy cannot converse with God. It is in the same spirit that Saint Athanasius can say peremptorily to his virgins, "Put away your timidity!"[3] and that the Church entrusts male and female identically with struggles and travail.

The persecutions gave the faithful the possibility of sealing their yearning for God with the martyrdom of blood. This was something that they received as God's gift and as a grace, as an achievement of His own power enabling their human powerlessness, as an honor and glory offered them by His infinite love for mankind, as a unique opportunity for opening up their lives to reality as from out of a dream, as a translation from corruption into eternity. The martyrdom of blood assured them of an immediate and certain salvation, of the tangible acquisition of God. Blood touched the womb of the Church and she gave birth to saints. The persecutions, more than anything else, became the life of her children because, by giving up their blood, they inherited heaven.

It was with enthusiasm that the Church lived in the vibrancy of the martyrs, although she recognized as well the tragedy of the Persecutions' dreadful whirlwind. In the so-called Liturgy of the Apostles, she calls the people to remember especially the holy martyrs in order to grow worthy themselves of "becoming participants in their struggles." So, too, does she believe that: "Where the Holy Spirit is, there follow persecution and struggle like a shadow,"[4] and conversely, that where there is martyrdom there, too, is the Spirit.

When by God's mercy the persecutions ceased, the souls especially on fire for the Kingdom of God turned more or less exclusively towards the ascetic life. And, as Saint Isaac the Syrian remarks,[5] that which the martyrs accomplished in the span of a single day, that by which they hoped and were assured that they would receive the crown of martyrdom, that which was but a fast and vigil for an evening for the sake of God's glory and in expectation of rejoicing in the great hour, this is what the monks in their turn, "who are called to an invisible martyrdom," accomplish every day and every night, in such tranquillity as the Church, now free of oppression, can the more perfectly arrange for them.

And now, in the aftermath of persecution, wherever there appear fathers who are adequate guides to Christ, there also bloom monastic brotherhoods and sisterhoods beyond count.

The daily martyrdom of the monks is, manifestly, an unceasing participation in the death of Christ and in the tortures of the heroes of the Faith. It is that by which they lay claim to their right to a share in the triumph of the saints. The tools of this martyrdom are asceticism, and obedience. They are the varied struggles, self-emptying, and humility put into practice. The arena is the cell. The monks, believing that "We must await death as a migration to the true life,"[6] struggle as dead men, in the world as in a "tomb before the tomb," and accept it as their arena.[7]

All of these, "men who bear in their hands their own blood," were beloved and were revered by the multitude of the people, and so they remain today. They rekindle the people's faith, empower their spirit, and lift them up to attendance on the Lord, and He shall make them worthy of "dancing with the martyrs and conversing boldly with the angels."[8]

Although it may not include the spilling of their blood, the martyrdom of the monastic way of life is obviously a consequence of the monastic vocation. It is the realization of the ascetic life. The latter in turn creates an innumerable variety of expressions depending upon the yearning, character, inner freedom, knowledge, circumstances, customs, and so forth, of the individual ascetic, and especially on the formation that his elder provides him, and on the elder's discernment. All this is manifested in a wonderful multitude of ascetic achievements.

Being liberated from the cares, tribulations and pressures impinging on the soul as a result of the world's habits and problems, the monk finds his way open to God in holy silence and within the monastic family, since the latter has precisely been created to accommodate this purpose and its accompanying spiritual condition. The monk gives himself up to asceticism, to self-denial, and to a divine keenness. He, as it were, inclines beyond to what is spiritual, to God, since as we said he lacks the problems, difficulties and headaches that are necessarily the lot of every human being in the world. He does everything and discovers yet more to do. He submits himself to much for the sake of perfection in the Lord. Whatever is objectively unnecessary or a matter of choice for a person in the world, the conscience of the monk imposes on him as, subjectively

and out of love, an obligation. Saint Theodore the Studite thus says: "Let us stand, brothers, as perpetual martyrs to our conscience... with tears, with attentiveness, with prayer, with compunction, with all the other mortifications of the body."[9]

The monk is informed by experience of what the Fathers lived, that is, that "from a broken heart waters shall spring forth"[10] welling up into the eternal life of the Spirit (John 4:14; 7:38–39). He is assured that in giving his blood he receives the Spirit." But when, to the contrary, he ceases to suffer mortification, he then falls away from hope and assurance, from certainty and his relationship with Christ.[12] To the degree that God is the goal of monastic asceticism, the monk knows no other goal nor any other mode of ascent and deification,[13] nor perfecting of perfection.[14] It is martyrdom alone that renders him an imitator and communicant of God. Becoming a monk is consequently the beginning of entry into a lifelong martyrdom of the conscience which, even while it rejoices in its contests, is yet never satisfied, but instead increases its struggles according to obedience and the abilities of the person who "has loved and chosen difficult paths" (Ps. 16:4 LXX).

And all these things he sees as "a slight, momentary affliction" (2 Cor. 4:17) that will bring him everlasting life. Not that he is justified by doing them, or that he has succeeded in accomplishing something: "It depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16). It is for us to suffer and to will. Every ascetic feat is a gift of God's love. By means of them all he who struggles simply expresses his yearning to flee the law of the sin of Adam and its consequences, and to attain to the immediacy of God's blessing and grace. He has in himself neither ability nor boast. He is "in the arena," but the crowns are in heaven with God.

With this thought the monk transforms even his nights into shining day for the sake of his soul. He struggles in order to win God's affection so that, on whatever day God may will, whether in this life or upon the loosing of our human bonds, his eyes may receive the grace of "gazing upon and beholding the vision of heaven."[15]

He lives and struggles gladly in the wearisome gloom of his own worthlessness, and in the invisibility and unknowability of the God Who has hidden Himself out of His super-abounding love. He believes that he is corrupt and a worm (cf. Job 25:6). And he believes in God, and looks for help for his unbelief. And again, because he believes he is a sinner, that he has sinned and fallen further than all other men, he shall see greater things than all that was seen by the prophets and kings. Thus with the cry of "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" wrung out of his many sufferings, he manifests the entire agony of fallen man and the latter's hope for communion in God's outpouring of light. This is the language that God recognizes and understands, the grammar by which His creatures are united to Him.

The monk is altogether fortunate because he communicates in this way with God. He does not make his obedience depend on divine visitations or alterations. His good is not beyond God, nor before God, but is God Himself alone.

God, however, Who gives us whatever our hearts desire, pours Himself out actively within us, in our intellect, our soul and body. Little by little we become aware of His presence, of how "He has illumined the nature of all things."[16] He makes known His mysteries and our own nature, what the latter becomes in Him.

Our life becomes a life of feasting with God: "And they appeared in the place of God and ate and drank" (Exod. 24:11 LXX). If Moses and the elders "appeared in the place of God and ate and drank," how is it possible that the man should not eat and drink who is thus somehow in God's presence? According to the multitude of his pains shall the consolations of the Spirit gladden his soul (Ps. 93:19).

Monastic martyrdom is therefore a painful ascent to God. It is love and yearning expressing themselves through asceticism to one's last breath, and it draws down upon itself the wages and gifts of divine grace.

So—what do you say? Is it not worthwhile, as the prophet says (Joel 3:9), that we prepare for this warfare, that we act as God's mighty warriors, and come to Him, all of us, as men of war?

On monks in the world. Before I conclude, I think it necessary to add the following to what I have said up to this point.

Unquestionably, it is martyrdom in withdrawal that the monk seeks. As a means of our emigration, it is what leads to God. However, we are assembled at a monastic conference where, while some come from monasteries and include Athonites, there are others who live, struggle, hunger, suffer and keep vigil for the sake of God's flock in the Church which does battle in the world.

The theme of our conference is monasticism and martyrdom. Does what we have said apply to everyone, both to monks in their monasteries and to those priest-monks who are in the world?

It does without a doubt. While the first live in the native land of their struggles, yet the priest-monks who are in the Church that is pastured in the world also live out a martyrdom in shepherding the struggling souls of God's sheepfold. It cannot be otherwise than that they should be themselves lovers of martyrdom, and pursue pain and trouble, and prepare themselves for new martyrdoms. Not being dragged down by the feverishness of the work place and its necessities, they see the theme of martyrdom as their most necessary attempt at a stewardship of time. Only thus can they provide for sufficient withdrawal for their spiritual and priestly struggles. But, in addition to their pastoral work, they should also foresee the degree to which they will fail in the work they do. Fail, not because they are themselves incapable of succeeding, but because—so we would say—the apostolate of the worker in the Church is precisely to fail, to fail in order to demonstrate the power of God.

Elijah the Zealot was sent to witness to the truth and preach the living God. But what results did this holy prophet see from his mission? The way in which God snatched him from this life was wonderful, certainly, but we might also say that it must have been a blow: it meant his replacement by another prophet. Yet it was exactly for the seed of his witness that God sent him.

John the Forerunner bore witness to the truth and reproved the lawless. Yet, while transgression went on and seems to prevail to the present

day, he lost his precious head! He did not succeed. Yet again, he remains the Forerunner of Christ, the very summit of the prophets.

Where is the multitude of churches that the Apostles founded in the East? Where are the ascetic feats and miracles accomplished by so many saints? What has happened to the preaching of ten thousand heralds of the divine Word? The world continues to wallow in the mire of sin.

And our own children, our own flocks, our own people for whom we grow weary and over whom we agonize? Let us admit that they will go on living in the sins of their hearts, in those passions by which the whole society lives. They shall, however, survive into eternity when God snatches them up in the hour ordained for each of them, and which He alone knows. God is the One Who gives the victory, even while we ourselves suffer perpetual hardship. It is He Who wins our people, not by our own labor but via the way He revealed to Isaiah, whose own failure He foretold when He prophesied to him: "The holy seed is its stump" (Isa. 6:13)—that is, the stump of Zion—as if to say to him: "You shall fail." And to continue with God's meaning: "The hour when the world devours My Word, the bread that I give it, it will blaspheme Me and deny Me, and will cry to Me: 'God, go away!' but in the midst of Zion I have Myself placed a seed, holy with the living power of the Spirit, which shall be its stump, its base, its root, its mighty core. It is a seed that endures through the passing of the ages and the whirlwind of sin, right up to and through the washing away of all that is evil. It will preserve the 'remnant' of Israel and shall transform it into Church, into the body of the Son of the God Who is Father of those who are saved."

This seed is preserved, living and active, in the monastic estate, which is the stump of the Church and recalls God's rights to the hearts of men, and the rights that men in turn may demand from God, rights of which they are often ignorant until they are revealed, mightily and openly, in the monastic life.

God has honored human life with the monastic estate, and through the same the world is made secure: "Through them, the monks, the world stands and human life is adorned."[17]

For this reason, fathers and brothers, let us have more confidence—whatever we may be in ourselves—in what we have committed ourselves to become by putting on the mantle of monks. Let us have more confidence in this than in what we are ourselves, however great or powerful we may think we are, or are indeed.

If we long to do something special of our own, let this be to rejoice because we, too, have been made worthy of becoming monks and, consequently, co-heirs of the *martyria* of the saints. Let us not be uneasy on account of any ministry whatever that we may have received, and let us not forget that our vocation is a vocation of martyrdom. On account of us, God cares for all our people. God intoxicates the earth. Can He not then intoxicate the hearts of the people of the Church as He has intoxicated our own?

Conclusion. Now let us conclude. I would like simply to express a single prayer for all of us. Let us have confidence in God, the memory of Him and a diligent love for Him. What are we, after all? And what is He? All of humanity, the whole universe, and all of us here with all the greatness of our hearts and labors and love, would not be able to meet even the breadth of God's little toe, nor the billionth part of His holiness.

So let us admit to ourselves that we are useless and fit as witnesses only to be crushed beneath the tread of that toe of God's love, be trodden in the winepress of the ascetic and Christ-delighting monastic life, be poured out as new wine to gladden the Lord and be changed into the sacrament of the world to come.

Some Afterthoughts

On priesthood in relation to the monks. Without a doubt the rank of the priest has always been revered by the monks. Thus in the past and the present day, whenever anyone went to the Holy Mountain he would have seen, and still can see, the oldest monk bowing low to kiss the hand of some youthful, even beardless cleric.

The priesthood is truly precious. It is not the Fathers' awareness of its great value that led them to forbid the monks to become priests.

Rather, this was for reasons of foresight, for the edification of the monastery, for pastoral reasons we might say today. This is so because longing for the priesthood is very deep in men's souls, and that longing is capable of scattering the brotherhood like ashes. On this account the Holy Fathers are very severe and strict on the question of the priesthood as it bears on monks. They honor the priesthood, but they also act to forestall the dissolution of the monastery, and moreover, the dissolution of the soul of the monk who has chosen the way of humility and not of teaching, the position of a sheep and not that of a shepherd, the latter of which is the role of the priesthood.

The priesthood that does appear among the brothers of a monastery is not a pastoral office. It is instead a service within the brotherhood, service within the sanctuary. To be sure, our bishops have always come from the monks, and a great many monks have, for various reasons, become priests in the world. This, however, does not comprise a rule, and neither does it alter the meaning and intention of the traditional practice.

On the quality of suffering. When the suffering that a man accepts willingly or offers to God is tainted by anxiety, it is revealed as false. An anxious man must be either a sinner or feeble. Anxiety cannot exist in a Christian soul, because such a state reveals that God has difficulty imparting His limitlessness, His love and comfort, to the soul. The faithful are praised as "in want," as "afflicted and suffering evils," but never as worried and troubled—unless, perhaps, it be in the case of a special test on the part of God.

Tears bring joy to the monks. They live out their suffering to the end in order to win the definitive smile of that life that endures forever.

Dogma and the monk. Every monk is always a theologian and a man of dogma. The monastic estate is the recapitulation of the whole content of Orthodox doctrine. It is a distillate of the experience of the Orthodox faith and its guardian. This is true, just as it is also true that the monks have often, of necessity, fought in defense of doctrine.

However, the natural place of the monk is asceticism and not the defense of doctrine in the public Church. The security of doctrine, its living-out and its preservation, comprise a necessary equilibrium in Orthodoxy. But the monasteries do not have it as their purpose to champion the doctrine. The holy Canons strictly forbid the monks from getting mixed up in doctrinal issues and in "church affairs." Permission is required for this purpose from the bishop.

To be sure, there have been periods when the monks have involved themselves—and they did well to do so—with defense of doctrine, and they continue to do it. The Holy Mountain, for example, protects the Church even today, but this is an exception. It presents itself as an imperative necessity by reason of the difficult period that the Church is presently experiencing.

The same Church assembled in councils is the assurance of the doctrine. The monks preserve its conscience unimpaired, and the council, bishop, etc., is obliged to take this into account. There are fathers, like Saint Barsanuphius and a great many others, who strictly forbad any mingling of monks in questions of the faith, and this in order that they dedicate themselves to their ascetic struggles. Such men, however, possess the doctrine in their very lives. They live it out in every one of their veins and their blood itself depends on it.

Let us pray that the necessity not arise that monks should have to intervene, but that the Church be ever Orthodox and rightly divide the word of truth.

10

Mount Athos: Sacred Vessel of the Prayer of Jesus

by Archimandrite Aemilianos

WHO IS UNAWARE that prayer is a primordial necessity for every soul, wherever that soul may be in our world?* It is a tree of life that nourishes man and makes him incorruptible, because it brings him into communion with the eternal and incorruptible God. Just as there is no such thing as a human being without a soul, in the same way it is impossible to imagine that one could live in Christ without prayer.

Inner prayer[1] is the attribute of the angels. It is the unceasing activity of the angelic hosts. It is the bread, the life, the language of these immaterial beings and their way of expressing their love of God. And the monks, who precisely live the angelic life in the flesh, affirm their love of God through the same unceasing prayer as that of the angels. This is why one can often see in the course of history monks who forgot to eat for days on end—ten, twenty, thirty days—so greatly were they occupied in fixing their inner regard on the Lord. Sometimes, people would knock at their door and they would not hear it, since their spirit was still in the heights, in communion with God. The prayer of the monks is the warming up of their heart. It places them in touch with the Father and Creator of the world.

It is their elevation to Heaven. Prayer is the encounter and sweet embrace of the monk with the Bridegroom and Savior of our souls.

Our Church, in so far as she is a spiritual organism, lives on this prayer. She lives through the prayers of her children. Of course, there are many forms of prayer. But, if one should ask what is the prayer *par*

*Extracts from a sermon given at the cathedral church in Dramas, Macedonia (northern Greece), on April 14, 1983.

excellence of our Orthodox Church which, as unfailing source, preserves at all times her spiritual dimension, then one must address oneself to her light-filled children who comprise the monastic order. Monastic life is, effectively, the pride and joy of the Church of Christ. It is the Gospel incarnate and lived. Monasticism is the sacred treasure of the Church, within which her dogmas are kept intact, her authentic piety, her sense of the martyr in all its acuteness, her unaltered spiritual tradition, and where her mission abides ever effectual and salvific. It is there, in that life, that the Church ever continues to sing her enthralling song of invitation to Christ, her Beloved, and through which she captures the all-shining Dove, the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father.

There is no need to travel afar in order to see how the Church preserves this divine voice of prayer in the heart of monasticism. We can observe it as a daily fact right here on the Holy Mountain, here, in this sacred vessel of our tradition, this island of salvation that God has placed in a stormy world, thanks to which souls without number have been delivered from the torments of sin and filled with the Kingdom of Heaven. We will find the prayer of Mount Athos everywhere, because it is *par excellence* the prayer of the Church. Who is unaware of this short little prayer, so sparing of words? It begins with the cry: *Lord,* through which we render glory to God, to His glorious majesty, to the King of Israel, to the Creator of the visible and invisible worlds before Whom the Seraphim and Cherubim tremble. Then it continues with the sweetest name, *Jesus,* by which we witness that Christ, our Savior, is present, and we give thanks to Him with the recognition that He has saved us and given us life everlasting. With the third word: *Christ,* we confess, as true theologians, that He is the Son of God and God. It is neither some man, nor an angel, who has saved us, but the true God Himself. Then, with this intimate request, *Have mercy on me,* we worship God and implore Him to show us His mercy by granting our prayers for salvation, and by answering our desires and filling up the needs of our hearts. Finally, in order that this prayer, which already embraces glorification, the action of grace, theology and supplication, should be complete, we conclude with the words: *a sinner.* We thus admit that we are

sinners—as we are, indeed—and so join the company of the saints who also confessed themselves such, and with this confession became sons of the light...

The Psalmist said that it is by His Name that God gives life (Ps. 143:11). Saint Gregory of Sinai who, coming from that mountain in the fourteenth century, restored the tradition of inner prayer at Mount Athos and traveled the world in order to spread the word of this tradition and show that it is the most perfect way of living the spiritual life, said: "This prayer is like a light that bathes us. It is this that is the goal of the Apostles' preaching, the Good News of God; it is the knowledge of God, the joy of Jesus, the soul's rejoicing. It is through this prayer that God accomplishes all in all."[2]

THE PRELIMINARY CONDITIONS BASIC TO PRAYER

As we know, a monastery is nothing other that an assembly (*synaxis*) of the brotherhood, an assembly of the whole, universal Church. The monasteries would have no justification for their existence if they did not truly constitute, day and night, a permanent worshipping assembly of the Church—Christ present in a given space and time. This is why the center of monastic life is the daily liturgy, and especially the eucharistic liturgy. It is there that the monk assimilates the spirit of the Church, that he acquires the sense of witness (martyrdom) and of ascesis. The liturgical texts fill up all his being, and become for him his own, personal experiences. Whenever the monks gather together, they know that they are not alone, but that with them there stand the angels and all the saints to give glory with them to God. The Holy Eucharist, and generally speaking the worshipping assembly: this is the presence of God. We who gather here for prayer become, mystically, God through participation in the activity of divine Grace. We enter into communion with the divinity, and this communion with God is the more genuine in being hidden (mystical), the more profound in being invisible.

But when we leave the temple and the assembly disperses, what then? Since there, where two or three of us are gathered, Christ is present

(Matt. 18:20), I will continue to receive Christ, to have Him within me in my life with my brothers, and we will remain thus just as we were in the temple. Through prayer communion with God continues in the cell and everywhere else. The prayer of Jesus is not an occasional petition that we direct to God. It is in fact our own deification. There would be no reason to stay all day in conversation with God if it were simply a matter of addressing words to him. God hears very well, even to the noises of our bowels. There would be no need to pray day and night. Rather, the prayer consists before all in feeding upon Christ, the Lamb of God, and of drinking the Savior Himself, by the invocation of His Holy Name. It is an intoxicating beverage, one that carries man into the heavens. It is the whole Christ whom we then absorb, and we become thus participants in God, reflecting—as Christ Himself—the divine attributes. We share in God and subsequently act, we too, mysteriously as gods.

As the Holy Fathers say, through inner prayer the monk "feeds at all times upon a spiritual manna."[3] A manna! You recall the manna that God made to fall in the desert for the Israelites, with which they were fed (Exod. 16). They called it "manna" because they did not understand what it was. For 'manna' means; "I do not understand what this is" (Exod. 16:15). God gave them this name without any meaning in order for them to understand that this bread that came down to them from heaven was symbolic. The Holy Fathers explain that this manna symbolized communion with Christ, the communion in which we are enabled to rejoice at every moment—just as the Israelites did with the manna that fell from heaven and covered all the ground. This manna is thus the prayer of Jesus that descends from heaven to fill us, to nourish and to refresh us.

The basic presupposition for the practice of inner prayer is therefore the conviction that this is not a simple prayer, but rather that it is communion and union with God. The inaccessible God is present and makes Himself attainable for us through His divine energies. God descends on us through the prayer and unites Himself with us, with us sinners. And, because we take Christ into ourselves, we clearly obtain

with Him the Father through the Holy Spirit. The Word who became flesh in history in Palestine, the Word of God who carries all creation on His fingertip, now allows Himself to be grasped by us when we say the Jesus Prayer. Christ enters into us, dwells with us, walks with us. As on the lake of Tiberias, when the disciples caught the hundred and fifty-three fish, John said to Peter: "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7), even so when I pray, here and now, before me and within me it is the Lord who is present, and I can say with all certainty, since it is the Church that assures me of it, "He is here, present! God Himself!"

In order for the believer to burn with the presence of the Lord through the prayer, however, he must be careful to see to it that his life accords with the life that is proper to God. Since he becomes God mystically through the prayer, he must live in a divine manner. He must believe that he can escape the misfortune and misery of sinful humanity, that it is possible for him to attain to the heights of impeccability, that he can be cleansed by Grace, that he may arrive at a state of freedom from the passions and live in the world without being shaken by anything that may be. It is thus that, in clothing himself with the form of God, he will become not just one who sees God, but God Himself.

THE MODALITIES OF THE JESUS PRAYER AND ITS EFFECTS IN US

The Holy Fathers say that the words of God "refresh the soul,"[4] that the word of God "gives strength to the soul,"[5] just as wine refreshes the body. If someone applies himself to the study of the ascetic writings on prayer, and especially if he is attentive in his labors, if he gives himself with effort in his life and pours out his sweat, if he is not stingy with his strength, but gives it willingly in his daily tasks, if his life is thus a daily ascesis, it is then that this asceticism and his study prepare the ground and make his soul capable of being elevated toward heaven. It is then that we can pray: *"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner"*, some with their mouths, others with their intellects [νοῦς], still others through putting their intellects in their hearts; and yet others still,

visited by divine Grace, whose intellects are illumined suddenly, cry out and meet God.

In order to practice this prayer, one must, according to the Fathers, possess and cultivate before all something particular. Just as we must pay attention to our health, in the same way, in order to give ourselves to prayer, we must attend to the health of our soul. This is why the Holy Fathers say that in order to practice the prayer, we must be joyous. If you cannot rise above your sorrow, the prayer will be dangerous for you. You can try it, but only if it gives you joy, for a prayer is only true if it fills us with gladness. What a wonderful description Saint Philotheus of Constantinople gives of Saint Sabbas of Vatopedi in his biography of the saint; "In every encounter he was full of joy, and his appearance always cheerful and full of grace."[6] An ascetic Father also notes: "Prayer is the product of joy and of the action of grace."[7] Do you want to know if your prayer is genuine? Look to see if it produces, if it gives you, as its fruit, joy, and if it brings your soul to the feast. The same Father adds: "Whenever one gives oneself to prayer, if he beholds born in himself a joy that surpasses all joys, let him then say: 'Thank God that I have prayed!'"[8] Since the prayer is communion with God, it always gives joy, and if it is not productive of joy, this means that we are harboring in ourselves something alien, and that our prayer is not authentic.

Certainly, we shall have to carry on our battle with sin and against the passions, as the Fathers say. But we shall also have to be careful not to cherish in ourselves any bitterness toward another, nor force our way into anyone else's life, nor coerce anyone, never injure another, nor vex him, nor allow ourselves to be vexed by him. It is absolutely necessary that our relations with others be natural and courteous... Then our prayer is easy. It is enough to let God do the work, like the peasant who sows his crop and then waits for God to send the rain. And if it does not rain, then he sends for the relic of the Holy Cross from Mount Athos [kept at the monastery of Xeropotamou] and, instructed by the experience of past such occasions, is careful to bring his umbrella with him to the meeting. This happened just a few years ago. As soon as the relic arrived at Ouranopolis [the first town from Athos], the rain began to

fall with such abundance that the peasants did not know where to take shelter! It is the same for us, too. Whenever we pray, we must wait on God for everything. Let us accomplish those tasks that we are given, let us call on the Name of Jesus, and God will do His part. He will make his rain, the "dew of Hermon," fall on our souls, and He will fill us with true joy. Because, if it is God who gives the joy, then we must become ourselves joy in Him. In the spiritual life it is God's Grace that accomplishes everything, and that is why we can sleep peacefully.

The Name of Jesus, *inner prayer,* the *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me* is, as the Holy Fathers say, like a vial of perfume. As soon as you tip it a little, the perfume escapes and fills the room with sweetness. In just that way, as soon as you say, Lord Jesus Christ, the perfume of the Holy Spirit releases itself. This is because at just that moment when we say the prayer, the Holy Spirit comes to support our weakness. He invites us and pushes us toward a more spiritual prayer.[9] But, above all, He prays Himself in us (Rom. 8:16), since we forget, we sin, we are troubled, and struggle with all sorts of ills. The Holy Spirit Himself fills up our weaknesses even when we sleep.

Every day when we say this prayer let us remember that we are the temple of God, that Christ dwells truly within us. If Christ is joined to me so intimately, then I, too, am "christ." As one Father of the Church put it so splendidly: "As soon as you give yourself to *inner prayer,* it is as if you took a censer in order to incense Christ, who is present in your heart, through the prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.* It is true that we celebrate our worship at the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit."[10]

What joy, what a blessing to think that the Kingdom of God is within us! We make of God our own possession, God with whom the saints are inseparably united. With me, therefore, are present all the saints, all the holy brethren who have drunk at the breast of the Holy Spirit the drink of faith and of truth. The prophet Isaiah said, "Blessed are they who have friends in Jerusalem" (Isa. 31:9, LXX). Yes, truly, we make of all the saints who are with Christ our friends. We have them with us, and we are blessed, because there above, in heaven, in the heavenly Jerusalem, are our friends, our dear ones.

You remember that Christ said: "Truly I say to you, there are those present here who will not taste of death until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). We live in fact in the Kingdom of God and, if we practice the prayer, it is to us, too, that our Lord will say these words: "There are those present who will not die before they see the Kingdom of God" because they have it already within themselves. The angels, the saints, and especially the Mother of God, work with the Holy Spirit in order for Him to give us everything that is necessary for us. Because it is the Spirit who enables us to lay hold of God when we pray. If you are far away, I do not see you well but if you come closer to me and if I see you well, then I can look on your face, understand your character and what you have within yourself. In the same way, when we pray and Christ draws near to us, we can then lay hold of and know Christ. He of whom it is truly said that no one has seen Him, whom no one can know, the inner being of God that is beyond thought and brighter than any radiance, becomes comprehensible to us through *inner prayer.* Certainly the prayer often seems to us difficult and tiring, but finally it brings us consolation, joy, forgiveness of our sins, and grants salvation to each as each can bear it—for God gives to each everything according to need.

The saints also often have visions of light. God Himself appears to them as light. Certainly God is hidden. None may see him, and that is why they say that he abides beyond the clouds, in darkness. In Himself, God is light, but he remains invisible to us. God has appeared in person to very many saints, however, as they themselves have borne witness, and has filled them with His immaterial light. There is the case, for example, of the holy Athonite whom we mentioned earlier, Saint Sabbas of Vatopedi. He was filled with desire for God, and, as he was standing one day in silence, his heart trembling with the search for God, the Lord suddenly spoke to him: "I am here! See, it is I!" How did He appear to the saint? "Suddenly," wrote his biographer, "a light flowed down from heaven."[11] A light that filled everything and that entered into him. It took possession first of his mind, then extended to his senses, and finally spread throughout all his members. After this he was so

luminous and gave forth such a perfume that people came by the thousands to breathe in his fragrance. They painted his image on wooden boards and honored him as a saint while he still lived, because they could see the holiness shining on his face.[12] "It is to such a mystery that he attains who hastens toward the perfection of the Gospel," the saint whispered one day into the ear of Saint Philotheus. Astonished, the latter turned toward him and saw the face of Saint Sabbas resplendent with joy and with a glorious light, like that which shone from the face of the Lord on the day of the Transfiguration.[13] When this light surrounds one, it transforms him, and holiness then appears in him in all its beauty, in all its glory, and with all its unutterable joy. Such a one can see God and all the heavenly things which *eye has not seen* (1 Cor. 2:9). So it is that Saint Sabbas went down into the desert, naked, without drink or food, and wandered for fifty days while crying out, his soul transfixed by divine love; "Where are you? Where do you repose? Show me your glory in all knowledge (cf. Exod. 33:13). For I want to see you as you are." When he collapsed at last, exhausted and on the verge of death, and an angel came from heaven to comfort him, he was surrounded with a "light which served him at once as food and drink."[14] It was as if he heard God answering him: "You have been deified, and your body as well according to the measure of your share in divinity. It is useless for me to tell you where I dwell, I God, since you are become yourself also god, by virtue of the light that you have received from Me."

At this point I should add that even if we have not ourselves rejoiced in these gifts of the prayer, this does not mean at all that others have not tasted of them. If we, sinners, have not yet seen the light, the saints, however, have seen it and bear witness to it. So likewise, in saying the prayer, we can ourselves say to each other: "listen, Christ is here and calls for you. You have only to repeat this secret word."

THE PRAYER ON MOUNT ATHOS

Such are the marvels accomplished by this prayer on Mount Athos. But it is not lived only on the Holy Mountain. This Prayer, cultivated for centuries on the Holy Mountain, has been spread throughout Greece,

Rumania, the slavic countries, and today even the western world. This is not to say, though, that it has ever left Mount Athos, where it continues to be practiced today and to bear much fruit. An Athonite ascetic, still living today, once said: "Ah! Twenty-four hours a day isn't enough for me to pray!" Do you grasp what must be the prayer of this man? Do you understand to what height he attains, and that he sees nothing earthly? His eyes and his heart look upon God, and twenty-four hours a day does not suffice him for praying. Whoever has tasted the sweetness of God can say the same. It is in this way that the great spiritual figures of recent times here, both within the monasteries and in the hermitages, have prayed—men like Daniel of Katounakia (+1929), Callinicus the great hesychast (+1930), Saint Silouan the Russian (+1935), Joseph the Hesychast (+1959), and many others still living.

A monk of our monastery, who died two years ago, had arrived at such a zeal for God that he did not want even to sleep on the bare ground, but instead supported himself by means of cords hung from the ceiling and leaned on a cane in order not to interrupt his concentration, and to be able thus to pray continually. Since he believed, like all the saints, that he was a great sinner, during his prayer he would make his prostrations by bumping his head on floor and saying: "It's because of my hard head that my prayer cannot rise higher than my throat and that God cannot hear it. I hope that He'll at least listen to my head banging against the floor!" And he was filled with such a great joy that in seeing his face one could say: "God will that I become like him, if only for an instant, and that I then die immediately!" You had to have seen how he died. Yes, truly, blessed is the death of a saint.[15]

Another ascetic in recent years needed several hours to celebrate the Holy Liturgy because the angels would visit him and come to celebrate with him. So he would delay the service and ask the monks present to leave in order to leave him alone with his guests and not interrupt them. And when the ecstasy had finished, he would open the door and say: "Let's continue the liturgy!"[16] How many others there are like this one even today!

There is still another old man, who nowadays lives alone. As he was reading the psalter one day during the office, his mind was suddenly transported beyond, flew above the sea and crossed mountains and valleys. His spirit embraced the trees, the flowers, the fish in the sea, the mountains and the islands that appeared to him from far away, and then he saw heaven and earth united and giving glory to God together with all the universe. Since that day he can no longer contain the tears that continuously stream from his eyes, because he saw then that even the inanimate creation pours out its tears in raising its song of glory to the Creator. "And I," he says, "who have a soul, I am immersed in sin." This man's spiritual father was Joseph the Hesychast,[17] and how that one kept vigil on his progress toward the Kingdom of Heaven, and was initiated into the divine mysteries! More than once God showed him His blessing, just as He granted him to have today on the Holy Mountain children in the Spirit, grandchildren, and entire monasteries that are stamped with the seal of his spiritual life.[18] Yes, indeed, through the prayer of Jesus, Christ was, is, and will be present on the Holy Mountain and throughout all His Church.

AND IN THE WORLD?

If the monk can associate the prayer with his life in the common-life monastery, the married Christian can join the prayer in the same way to his or her life at its very hearth. The capricious husband, the ill-tempered wife, the lazy child... he or she will put all this aside before being overwhelmed by it, and then lift up his or her thought toward God. No obstacle, nor any trial, can interrupt our progress toward God. If the prayer is everything we have truly to say, what then is our life worth without it? It seems to me that without the prayer, our life is like a car traveling along a road. When the car finally stops somewhere, what then? Don't we then perceive how ephemeral we are? The whole world itself, without the prayer, is like such a moving car. The earth spins about its axis, but one day it will stop forever. Heaven and earth will vanish away, will disappear, like all the cars that we take first to the repairman, and then finally to the junkyard. A heart that lacks the

prayer also seems to me like a plastic bag, the sort that one uses for a moment to carry something in, but then throws into the garbage can the minute it tears. It is the prayer that gives meaning to our existence, and that is because it is the prayer which gives us God.

But you will say: "I say the prayer, but I understand nothing of it." Then repeat the prayer. God sees you, and will come visit you. Put aside your worries, and sit down at the feet of Christ. They say that the end of the world will come when people stop praying. But is it possible that they will ever stop? This continual prayer mystically bedews the whole world as soon as it springs from our lips. Let us therefore prepare our mystical censers so that, wherever we may go, whatever we may do, through having the prayer on our lips and in our hearts we may become God's tabernacles, ourselves also bearers of God.

Solomon says somewhere that God, the uncreated light, chose the created light of the sun, but that He abandoned it because it was not possible for this bright star that lightens the worlds to be the habitation of the transcendent One. *He has abandoned the sun and taken darkness as His dwelling place, that is to say invisibility* (1 Kings 8:15). If we cannot look directly at the sun, how can we fix our gaze upon Christ, the Sun of Life who is brighter than all the stars? This is why He hides Himself in invisibility, in order to leave us free to believe in Him and to choose Him. Solomon, that man of greatness, built the Temple of Jerusalem. He gathered gold, silver, pearls, and all the most precious materials on earth to build it. After he had spent more money than was ever spent in order to build God's house, he said: *I have built for my God an exalted house, a place for Thee to dwell in for ever* (1 Kings 8:13), which is to say, the Church.

As for us, we have our dwelling place, our hearts. Remember what the Lord said when he ascended to heaven: *I shall be with you always* (Matt. 28:50). So, too, when the priest elevates the chalice before the people at the end of the Liturgy, he says: *Now and ever and unto ages of ages.* What does this mean? Christ says to us, "I am leaving, I am retiring into my darkness, into my invisibility. You will lose sight of me, but remember that I am always before you, within you. I will remain,

imperceptible, within the secret of the sanctuary. I will be eaten by the priest, so that you, you as well, may taste of me whenever you wish."

This is why, dear brothers and sisters, you must prepare your censers and your spiritual perfumes. God is not contained by any dwelling place, not even by the Temple of Solomon, that splendid edifice that God Himself destroyed. Why? Because He wishes that the heart of each of us should become His dwelling place through the prayer.

11

The Experience of the Transfiguration in the Life of the Athonite Monk

by Archimandrite Aemilianos

ATHOS AND TABOR

EVERY YEAR, FOR CENTURIES, on the eve of the feast of the Transfiguration, monks leave from the monastery of Great Lavra and climb to the peak of Athos where there is a little chapel dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Savior. There, between heaven and earth, at an elevation of over sixty-five hundred feet, they will celebrate throughout the ensuing night the all-night vigil as their brothers are doing in the other monasteries of the Holy Mountain. As they slowly climb at the mule's pace the slopes of Athos, just as the Apostles ascended once before those of Tabor in the company of the Savior, they sing the hymns of the forefeast:

> Come, let us ascend with Jesus
> As he climbs the holy Mountain...[1]

En route, monks from different parts of Athos join together with pilgrims of every nationality to form a procession which recalls the gathering of the Hebrews from all the corners of Palestine to celebrate with the proselytes the feasts of the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem, on Mount Zion...

To which the tribes go up,
The tribes of the Lord,
As was decreed for Israel,
To give thanks to the name of the Lord (Ps. 123:4).

This "holy peak," often covered with brilliantly white snow, sometimes reflecting the sun's rays, sometimes remaining hidden in the clouds, was predestined to become a "mountain of light"—the ancient word, *aithon*, means "fiery," "luminous," "sparkling." It occupies a very special place in the hearts of the Athonites, who regard this mountain as the axis of the world uniting heaven and earth, as the column by which their prayers ascend to God, as God's footstool, as the dwelling-place chosen by the All-Holy Queen, the "Mother of the Light"[2] and "Abbess of the Abbots." Quite innumerable are the icons and engravings that represent the Mother of God above the snowy peak of Athos, holding over the mountain her holy veil (*maphorion*), symbol of the "Protection" of her prayers.

Conforming to an ancient and uninterrupted tradition, the monks climb regularly up this "Holy Summit" in order to fulfill a personal pilgrimage, to pray in a place closer to heaven, or to perceive some sign from God at critical moments in their lives.

It was on this "Holy Summit," during the tenth century, on the day of the Transfiguration while he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy, that Saint Euthymius, the founder of the monastery of the Georgians (Iviron), saw the light of God flash like a burning fire: *"And suddenly,"* writes his biographer, *"an immeasurable light filled all that place, the earth shook and everyone fell to his face on the ground. Only the blessed Euthymius remained standing appearing like a column of fire, motionless in front of the holy altar."*[3]

Four centuries later, the All-Holy Mother of God revealed herself to Saint Maximus Kavsokalyvites in the midst of a great light accompanied by perfumes, and holding the Lord an her arms. She blessed the saint, and filled him with divine joy.[4]

It is there once again that, after centuries full of such occasions (which were not all recorded), that Father Joseph (+1959), that great

hesychast who was the initiator of the contemporary renaissance on the Holy Mountain of the tradition of the "prayer of the heart," met his future companion in asceticism, Father Arsenios (+1983), and decided to take up his wandering life of hesychasm on the slopes of Athos. One day, when he was overcome by spiritual dryness, and had reached the depths of despair, a ray of light burst suddenly from the holy peak and pierced straight through to his heart. From that point his intellect [νοῦς] like a sort of spiritual Mount Tabor, never ceased from abiding permanently united with Jesus in his heart.[5]

From another source, the monks often like to tell of the seven ascetics who live up among the crags, naked and unknown to all, who over the centuries hand on from generation to generation the secret tradition of asceticism and contemplation. It is of small importance whether this tradition is mythical or not, since it reveals in fact the central place that the "holy peak" occupies in the conscience and life of the Athonites. This is why the little chapel of the Transfiguration and the immense iron cross set up to the side of the latter on that narrow, rocky shelf have a quite special, symbolic value. Like two flags stretching out in counterpoint to heaven and to the world, they reveal the two characteristic traits of monastic life; the *via crucis*, voluntary and continuous participation in the Lord's Passion, but as well—and at the same time—the way of deification, the life in eschatological light and glory promised to human nature that Christ unveiled, for one brief moment, to His Apostles on the summit of Tabor.

Just as Christ took aside "in particular" His chosen disciples to climb up the mountain and pray there (Luke 9:28), just so the monks, having renounced the world to live on Athos in "quiet (*hesychia*) and in prayer," live even here and now in the light itself of the Transfiguration. Athos is for them a new Tabor, the anticipatory sign of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the twilight of Byzantium, when Saint Gregory Palamas, Athonite and great teacher of the divine light, fought his battle against the humanists in defense of the hesychasts, and in support of the Orthodox doctrine of deification—that is, of man's real participation in the life of God through uncreated grace—the question of the Transfiguration

and of the nature of the light of Tabor occupied the heart of the dispute. Throughout all their works, Saint Gregory Palamas and his disciples make innumerable allusions to this key event, and they show how the transfiguration of the Lord, as model of our own deification, is the feast *par excellence* of monasticism, the patronal feast (*panigyri*) of the Holy Mountain.[6] For years Saint Gregory lived at the feet of Athos, at Great Lavra, and as a hesychast at the "kellion" of Saint Sabas, high on the mountain.[7] For him, as for every contemporary Athonite, Athos is identified with all the "mountains of God" where God has revealed Himself to men: Mount Zion, Mount Sinai, Carmel, the Mount of Olives, and Golgotha. It is also like all those "holy-mountains" where the Lord has rested "in His saints" (Ps. 149:1), "in the assembly of the gods" (Ps. 82:1): Mount Olympus in Bithynia, the original home of the first Athonites, Mount Latros, Mount Ganos, Mount Saint-Auxence, and all the glorious monastic centers of Asia Minor. It prevails over Mount Olympus, former home of the twelve gods, which one can see on a clear day from the summit, and as kin to all the holy mountains of Greece, especially to the sanctified stones of the Meteora, dominated by the Monastery of the Transfiguration which was founded in the fourteenth century by an Athonite, Saint Athanasius. Here are to be found, as in a kind of summary, all the holy, monastic mountains of the Peleponnesus, of Macedonia, of the Carpathians, of Armenia (where one finds the famous Mount Ararat), of the Caucasus, and as well, so many of the high places of monasticism in the West, like Saint Benedict's Monte Cassino, or Mount Mercurius in Calabria, refuge of Byzantine ascetics in times of persecution. One can find in Serbia a group of monasteries called the "little Holy Mountain," and even Saint Seraphim himself had his "little Holy Mountain" in the depths of the forest at Sarov. Athos is thus to be identified with all those mountains which have served as "Tabor" for the monks of every century who have flown there for refuge "like a bird to the mountains" (Ps. 11:1).

In the course of the night hours, in that little chapel, so narrow that only a few can stay inside while the others are warming themselves around a great fire outside, the voices of the cantors became the

trumpets of the Church carrying for the whole world the message of the everlasting light.

THE SHINING VESTURE OF THE LORD

Morning having come, after the Liturgy and a sober and fraternal meal shared out in the hermitage of the Mother of God a little below the peak, the pilgrim comes back down from the mountain in silence and in joy, and bearing—not on his face like Moses coming down from Sinai (Exod. 34:30)—but in his heart the reflection of God's glory. For the participants, this feast was not simply some commemoration of an event that took place long ago, but a true actualization of all the mystery of Christ, of which everyone becomes the bearer who participates in the Holy Eucharist. They come down from the Mountain with Jesus. They have clothed themselves with Him. They have been filled with the Bread of Life, and with the continual invocation of His name, in order to continue their journey, within the context of their monastery (or scete, or hermitage), toward the heavenly Jerusalem. For the monk the monastery is the place of his crucifixion and burial, the unique place where he can live out heaven on earth—for every monastery is, in itself, the New Jerusalem, "coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God" (Rev. 21:10–11). Of course, every monastery is also a human society with all the imperfections which that implies. It is a part of the community of the Holy Mountain, and each one is different from the others, but still it remains an expression of the Church in all the fullness of her mystery. Nothing in the world provides a more perfect and living image of the Church than an Athonite monastery. It is the product of the entire tradition of the Church which has organized its least detail, the architecture, the organization of space, the canonical statute, the routine of its daily life, and so forth in such a way that the monastery can offer its members the best possible conditions for the accomplishment of the mystery of Salvation: to find God among men, and men who are, as it were, already living in heaven. Just as in the eschatological city of God, there is nothing crude, nothing worldly or carnal: "Nothing unclean shall enter it" (Rev. 21:27). All things there

are both human and divine. While preserving their created nature, they are yet filled with divine activity and convey the life of God. Having voluntarily renounced the world and worldly things, crucified to the world as the world is to them (Gal. 6:14), the monks no longer live enslaved to fate or to necessity, but as the free sons of the Most High, as sons of the light (John 12:36), as the "bright children of the Church"[8] whose "commonwealth is in heaven" (Phil. 3:50). In the monastery they live a liturgy without interruption, a daily transfiguration of the world, of matter, of space, of time, of movement, of human action and society.

The Transfiguration of Christ. When, before the crucifixion, the God-man took His three chosen disciples with Himself up the mountain of Tabor, He was not Himself transfigured before them. He did not put on some other form, or in other words become something that He was not already. He did not shine with a glory that was forbidden to Him.

His Person, perfect and divine-human, underwent no change or transformation. Rather, according to the Holy Fathers, Christ at that time opened the eyes of His disciples, "made them pass from the flesh to the spirit," as Saint Maximus the confessor wrote.[9] Saint John the Damascene explains: "He is therefore transfigured, not in taking on what He was not, but in showing His disciples what He was, opening their eyes—they who were blind—and making them see."[10]

He permitted them to contemplate for a brief instant the glory of His divinity which was united in His own Person, "without confusion, without change, indivisibly and inseparably,"[11] to His human nature. This Glory of God, inaccessible and unbearable for the created being, Christ had during His earthly sojourn covered, out of condescension, under the "veil of flesh,"[12] the shadow of His body.[13] It is now that He reveals it to the "open" eyes of the Apostles. As Saint Gregory Palamas teaches, He then revealed His flesh to be as transparent as crystal: "The divine power shone as through panes of glass, resplendent for those whose hearts are pure to see it."[14]

He reveals, for an instant, the permanent state that His body would have after the Resurrection, and that the bodies of the saints possess in

the Kingdom of Heaven, in order to confirm the Apostles and prepare them for the test of His Passion. "Before your Crucifixion, O Lord, you took your Disciples with you to a high mountain and were transfigured before them, making the rays of your power shine on them; in your love for man and your sovereign power. You wished to reveal to them the splendor of your Resurrection."[15]

This uncreated light, this unique glory and energy of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, "the beauty of the everlasting age to come,"[16] springs from the body of Christ as from a source of light. It becomes the "reflection of the flesh which is like God,"[17] and allows them to see *now* the Kingdom of God come "with power," as the Lord had promised them before taking them with Him to the mountain: "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come in power" (Luke 9:7).

And, as in the visible world the sun's light is poured out on all creatures to give them life, so this uncreated light communicates itself to the clothes of the Lord, which become "white as the light," because the union with God "according to the Person" is one thing, and another is participation in grace according to His uncreated energy: "His face shines like the sun, because He is identified, according to hypostasis, with the immaterial light, and it is for this that He became the Sun of Righteousness; but His vesture becomes white as the snow because it receives glory by vesting and not by union, relatively, and not according to the Person."[18]

According to Saint Maximus the Confessor, this vesture which is resplendent with "a dazzling whiteness" (Luke 9:29), comprises the *logoi* of creation, that is, the ontological roots of created being, which have found their fulfillment, their *recapitulation*, in the divine-human Person of the Word of God incarnate.[19] The elements of the natural world, freed from the weight of the flesh, no longer cover Christ like the heavy clothes of winter, but become supple, luminous, bearers of the Spirit, and convey thus to humanity the radiance of God's glory.

The Transfiguration of the World in Liturgical Prayer. Likewise, after the Cross, in the Church, in the monastery, where the different buildings are gathered around the *katholikon* like the members of a body encircle its heart, all the activities of the community and of its members have the divine worship as their center. In an unceasing doxology the monks rejoice in the permanent presence of the transfigured Savior, illuminated by the glory of His face that pours out upon His vesture.

In the same way as in Byzantine icons, which describe in a symbolic manner the transfigured world and the saints, whether by recourse to gold, to an inverse perspective, to the combination at once of different events from different periods, in the same way in divine worship—and by extension in all the life of the community—everything undergoes a wonderful transformation. Time, space, and matter, all the "flesh" of this world which was assumed by the Word of God, become as limpid as crystal in His eucharistic Body, which is here present among us and which, as on Mount Tabor, shines "like the sun." The light of God extends itself to all the rest of creation which already "shares in the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:11). Within the monastery, it is in the light of Christ that we see this light in the world; "in your light we shall see light" (Ps. 36:9).

Space, which separates us from one another, arranges itself within the "microcosm" of the temple, and becomes harmony and order: heaven (i.e., the dome) covers the whole of the earth which in turn is symbolized by the clear spacing of the four columns and signed with the seal of the Cross, and both direct men toward that which is beyond, the world above, the Holy of Holies, which is represented by the sanctuary. Here, life is no longer confusion and scattering. Rather, gathered around the great *choros* and the *polyeleos*, those two huge chandeliers that hang in the corner of the church like the two lights of heaven, and which, on feast-days, swing to the rhythm of the Byzantine chant, the monks "dance" in choir together with all creation.

The gold that is used with such great profusion in Orthodox churches to cover all the objects used in the liturgy is no vain display of wealth, but rather symbolizes the condition of matter which has been

penetrated by the Light, and which thus has itself become luminous. As for the smoke of the incense that accompanies our prayers toward heaven, it is the sign of the sweet fragrance of Christ "Who, through us, spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere" (2 Cor. 5.14). Oil and wax, offerings of the vegetable and animal world, provide us with the light of the vigil-lamps and candles, whose intensity is no longer dependent on seasonal or climatic changes but is obedient to the *typikon* of the Church. The ecclesiarchs run about like angels lighting or extinguishing the lamps in accordance with the importance of the feast or the sequence of the service. This sight, like everything that occurs within the church, is stripped of every worldly character and becomes hallowed action and sacred dance. Within this hallowed space, the movement and mobility of created nature are transformed, and become aids in our progression toward heaven. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote: "That which once seemed an obstacle, I mean the changeable character of our nature, becomes instead a wing in our flight toward the heights."[20]

Time reverses itself and, instead of leading us towards death, it moves toward life, towards Him Who is "the Light of the world" and Who said: "He who follows me... will have the light of life" (John 8:12). This is why we no longer reckon the days as moving from morning to evening, but begin the liturgical day with vespers. From darkness we are led to light in the light of the Lord.

Every moment, every hour, every day, every liturgical cycle reveals Christ to us, Christ in Himself or Christ in His saints, ever the same and ever different. In vespers, while the sun is embracing the horizon, we light our lamps while praising the uncreated Light Who comes to lighten our night:

> Joyful light of the holy Glory of the immortal Father,
> Heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ!
> Having come to the setting of the sun,
> We praise Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God.
> At all times Thou art worthy of praise in songs,
> Son of God and Giver of Life,

> Therefore all the World glorifies Thee (Hymn sung at Vespers).

At night, in getting up before the dawn, like the holy myrrh-bearing women who came seeking the light of the risen Christ "at early dawn" (Luke 24:1), we read the midnight office. "My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate upon your words" (Ps. 119:148), we confess at that time together with the Psalmist. The Lord lives in His commandments, and His law is the true light that illumines the new creation, His church. This is why, a little later, after the six psalms which are read with compunction in the darkness, we light the first candle in the Church while singing.

> My spirit seeks you early in the nightwatches,
> For your commandments are a light upon the earth.[21]

And at dawn, we sing:

> Send your everlasting light, O Christ God,
> And illumine the hidden eyes of my heart.[22]

Then, at the end of the service of matins, we invite all creation to praise God in the psalms of Lauds (Ps. 148–150), and we intone in a loud voice the Great Doxology, a song of triumph at the victory of the light over the powers of darkness: "Glory to Thee who hast shone us the light..."

At the end of Prime, we say the prayer: "O Christ, the true light, Who illumines and sanctifies everyone who comes into the world, let the light of Thy countenance shine on us, that we may see the light unapproachable. Direct our steps to the fulfillment of Thy commandments..."

And at last, when we commune in the Heavenly Bread, and become by grace "lights from Light" through Christ, "light of that triple sun which illumines the whole world... ,"[23] we can sing the song of our own victory: "We have seen the true light, we have received the Heavenly Spirit..." (from the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom).

During the great *agrypnies* [vigil services on the eves of major feasts] which are occasionally true vigils going on through the night for as

many as fourteen hours, one senses that one is no longer on earth, but already in heaven with the angels and the saints. Man is no longer the slave of the universe's laws, but free, master of the world, and immortal. The oppositions between night and day, darkness and light, this mark of dualism, of corruption and death, is overcome. The church and the monastery, like the New Jerusalem, are lit by a day that knows no night: "And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).

This same light of the Kingdom of Heaven, which has already illumined the world, shone formerly above the cave at Bethlehem when the "Sun of Righteousness" made "the light of knowledge dawn upon the world."[24] It is equally the light of Theophany—also called the Feast of Lights—and the light of the Transfiguration, the light of the glorious day of the Resurrection, when we sing: "Now all is filled with light,"[25] the light of the Ascension and the fire of Pentecost. In all these Feasts, we live out in different ways the same reality: the transfiguration of man and of the world in the presence of Christ in His Body, the Church.

The transfiguration of human society. This light, which shone then from the face of the Lord, was the three-fold ray of the Holy Trinity, the unique and deifying energy of the glory of God's grace, which gave to the three Apostles the lived knowledge of the great mystery of the one Godhead in three Persons, and which rendered them "participants of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) while uniting them one with another. In this light, therefore, Peter, James, and John cease to be three separate individuals and become instead, and in accordance with the model of the Holy Trinity, three persons, distinguished from each other by their free will and unique characteristics, but united in charity and concord. So it is that on the mountain of Tabor the Holy Trinity was revealed as the shaping principle of the divine-human (theandric) society of the Church. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name"—that is, in the light of My presence, as on Tabor—"there am I in the midst of them," says the Lord (Matt. 18:20).

It is the same in the monastery, where everyone has come in order to offer himself freely as a "reasonable holocaust," where the other man is not my enemy, my "hell," but where the light of Christ makes him instead my neighbor, my brother, the son of the same Heavenly Father, a unique member among the other members of Christ's Body (1 Cor. 12:27). Here there is no place for any antagonism whatever, because there is nothing here which is "mine" or "yours," but all is in common. Even the spiritual progress and divine charisms of one become the joy of all the body, and the consolation of those who are weak or enduring temptations. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:56). This is the admirable teaching which Saint Macarius applies to the monastic community when he writes: "This is truly the angelic life on earth, when we live together without jealousy, with simplicity, love, peace, joy, complementarity, considering the progress of our neighbor as our own profit, and the relaxation, fall, or trial of our neighbor as our own loss... The surplus of those who persevere continually in prayer makes up the loss of those who place themselves at the former's service, or of those who rest, and likewise, the surplus of those who serve and work makes up for what is lacking for those who spend their time in prayer... "[26]

Become of "one body" (Eph. 3:6) with Christ through communion in His body, the monks are joined together in a single soul (cf. Phil. 2:2), as in the Church of apostolic times where "the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common" (Acts 4:32).

Joy, peace, concord, participation in the same breath of common life and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit bear fruit here in the illumination of His deifying energy. The life in common with the other brothers, in unity (*epi to auto*) is sweetest light for the monk, "like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3). Light is as well the discipline and hierarchical order that obtain in all the expressions of the common life, thanks to which the confusion and scattering of the

world of corruption are abolished. Everything is done "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40), as in heaven, and all our activities, like the sun's rays, derive from the uncontested authority of the abbot and are referred back to him. The abbot occupies the place of Christ. He is the living icon of the Lord. This is why obedience to the superior (which often gives the worldly person the impression that the monk has deprived himself of his personality and is simply being exploited), this absolute and unmurmuring obedience of the monk, is in fact the principle means of freeing him from death and his separation from God, to which he had been given over by egoism and a spirit of "autonomy." Obedience is the imitation of Christ's "self-emptying" (*kenosis*, cf. Phil. 2:6). It is communion in the will of God and in the divine power of personal resurrection. It makes the monk a son of the Most High. The abbot is no mere director for the monk. Rather, the former has no other goal than the salvation of his disciples' souls. He is thus far more their father than their master, and as such, the monk can and does bow before him—or before his throne when he is absent—because the abbot's place is the "place of God." It is obedience that sheds its light in the souls of the monks, and that makes their faces shine with untroubled joy.

Light is also the work of the monastery, which is here not servitude but service (*diakonia*), a serving of the community that is without profit-seeking, without constraint or haste. It is a sacrifice pleasing to God that is illumined by prayer, and that is a collaboration in the transfiguration of the world and the things of the world. It is a continuation of the Divine Liturgy outside of the church's walls. For here, in the monastery, both the contemplation and the use of the physical world become light, inasmuch as that usage is devoted not to pleasure but in response to the community's needs, not for a destructive consumerism aided by technology, but in order to render nature a participant in the glory of the children of God, that she may join in their song.

Light, again, is the study of Holy Scripture and the works of the Fathers of the Church. This study is not engaged in by the monks for reasons of vainglory, nor in order simply to pile up knowledge. Rather, they feed on the words of the Word, drink them, in order themselves

to live, and to convey to their brothers the hope of life everlasting (Rom. 15:4).

The monks do not preach. They do not go out into the world, in spite of the needs of the Church. But this city of God which is the monastery is radiant. It becomes a light for men, a lamp of the Church, the latter's unmoved mover, and the mystical center that binds her to heaven. This city shines even to the ends of the world through the unceasing prayer of the monks, and it illumines every pilgrim whom it receives and welcomes as an angel of God (Heb. 13:5) and an icon of Christ (Matt. 25:35).

Living as it were in a perpetual feast-day, the monastery is the realization of the perfect city, the "Republic" dreamt of by the philosophers and poets of every era. It is a little world, a society in miniature, which has already been transfigured and, thus, which offers to men, from the height of the "high mountain"—as from Tabor—an anticipation of the world to come.

This icon of the new Jerusalem is adorned like the Bride who stands at God's right hand "with gold-woven robes; in many-colored robes" (Ps. 45:13–14). It is there that Christ stoops and cries: "You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you" (Song of Songs 4:7). It is there that God bows the heavens (Ps. 18:10) and comes down to visit us. It is there that He dwells and reveals all His glory, not for a moment, but for always. Thus now, after the Crucifixion, the monks are enabled, like the Apostles once before, to say: "It is good for us to stay here" (Matt. 17:4), without fear of hearing the Lord's reproaching them for sentiments all too human,[27] because they live on this Tabor as ones who are crucified and dead to all that concerns this world.

THE BRIGHT CLOUD

At sunset, after having finished his *diakonia*, accomplished his daily tasks, and retired to his cell, the monk does not cease to continue living the Transfiguration under the two forms that the Disciples experienced in exemplary manner on the summit of Tabor. While during the liturgical assembly he sees Christ in the light of His glory, and shares with the community and the visible world in the light of the Kingdom of

Heaven, when he closes the door of his cell behind him—like the stone rolled up against the entrance of the Lord's tomb (Mark 15:46)—then, in the deeps of the night, he is covered by the cloud. At that moment, alone with God, he lives truly as "monk," *monachos* [i.e., solitary]. Every vain glimmering of this world is extinguished—all sensual delights, preoccupations, ideas. The consolation of the brothers' presence and the reflected glory of the New Jerusalem in the liturgy have withdrawn from him, and he must confront his own, inner depths, the darkness of his passions, his wavering, the scattering of his intellect [νοῦς], and the hardness of his heart. He descends thus into his own, inner hell, in order to triumph there together with Christ, the conqueror of death.

During the daytime he has been in preparation for the battle of the night, doing the "works of light" and cleansing the senses of his soul by the light of the divine commandments. During this time he puts on, as Saint Symeon the New Theologian writes, the holy virtues in the manner of coals, or candles, which will burst into flame the moment the fire of the Holy Spirit comes near. The day is therefore the time of *praxis*, whose goal is impassibility (*apatheia*), while the night is that of contemplation (*theoria*), of personal communion with God through prayer. Every night, spent in darkness and in quiet (*hesychia*), is for the monk a daily sabbath. All ordinary work comes to a stop, and all that remains is a cry directed unceasingly to God: "Lighten my eyes!" (Ps. 13:3), or, as Saint Gregory Palamas repeated constantly, "Lighten my darkness!"[28] There is nothing left now for the monk except this one thing: to wash the eyes of his heart with the tears of his face while repeating with the Psalmist: "Every night I flood my bed with my tears; I drench my couch with my weeping" (Ps. 6:6), and to touch the fringes of Jesus' cloak (cf. Matt. 14:36) while crying, like the blind man of the Gospel: "Lord, have mercy on me, that I may receive my sight!" (Luke 18:39–41), such that the darkness may be scattered by the invocation of the Name of the Lord. The Name of Jesus, of One of the Holy Trinity, becomes thus the personal and inner echo of the divine voice that the Disciples heard on Tabor coming from the cloud in order to bear witness to the Savior's divinity. Christ makes Himself present here through the sacrament

of His Name, and dim night is transfigured into "bright cloud," into a darkness where God dwells.

In effect, the incomprehensible God Who dwells in "inaccessible light" (1 Tim. 6:16) has a preference for obscurity, for the darkness as His dwelling-place among men and His mode of revealing Himself to them. "The Lord has said He would dwell in thick darkness" (2 Chron. 6:1; 1 Kings 8:12). "He made darkness His covering around Him, His canopy thick clouds dark with water" (Ps. 18:11). Every theophany, every revelation of His glory in the history of Israel, was heralded by the cloud. He led Israel in a "pillar of cloud" (Exod. 13:21) and the cloud covered Mount Sinai for six days before God invited Moses to enter the darkness in order to see His Glory, whose aspect was that of "a devouring fire" (Exod. 21:17–18). The same pillar of cloud "abode upon the tent of meeting" (Exod. 40:35) and later, when Solomon dedicated the famous temple of Jerusalem, "a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:10–11). At other times, once a year, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the people, and was obliged beforehand to fill the place with the smoke of the censer, "lest he die" in looking upon the glory of the Lord (Lev. 16:19).

It is the same in the New Testament. The Lord is born at night; at Tabor He is covered by a "bright cloud" so as to reveal His consubstantiality with the Father and the Holy Spirit; He ascends to heaven taken up by a cloud (Acts 1:9), and He will return again "on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30) to judge the living and the dead. And now again, obscurity is the mode of preference for meeting God, within a cloud that becomes luminous.

In the dimness of the night, struggling against the darkness of egoism and the attacks of "the world rulers of this present darkness" (Eph. 6:12), repelling every false brilliance, that is, every thought, product of imagination, or apparition coming from the devil who knows how to "disguise himself as an angel of light" (1 Cor. 11:14), the monk clings to nothing other than the Name of Jesus alone, not in order to analyze

it, but to taste the Lord's presence. Then the lack of light within his cell is transformed into that "swift cloud" upon which the Lord of glory sits (Isa. 19:1). Just as the cloud that covered the Disciples on Mount Tabor was, according to the Holy Fathers, a representation of the Holy Spirit Who testified to Jesus' divinity,[29] and Who "overshadowed" the All-Holy Mother of God (Luke 1:35) so that she could become the true "Tabernacle of the Word," so now the cloud becomes for the monk "the shadow of God which begets," which causes the birth of God within him. The cloud becomes the tabernacle and temple of God, a "bright cloud" that makes night into day and fills the day with delight:

> The night even becomes my light in my delight.
> For the darkness is not dark to you, the night is bright as day;
> For darkness is as light to you (Ps. 139:11–12).

The cell of the monk is the crucible where, during the night, the great work of his personal transfiguration is accomplished. Abba Isaac the Syrian writes: "Choose for yourself a work full of delight, continuous vigil throughout the night, for it is in that that all the Fathers were stripped of the old man and were reckoned worthy of the renewal of the spirit [νοῦς]. In those hours spent there the soul becomes aware of life everlasting, and in this spiritual sensation it strips off its old clothes of darkness in order to receive the Holy Spirit."[30]

During the night the soul of the monk, covered by the shadow of Christ the Bridegroom, sings a song of love: "With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste" (Song of Songs 2:3). Even if he does not yet feel clearly His presence; if he does not grasp this mystery which the services have shown him symbolically in the light, and if he cries out; "Upon my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer" (Song of Songs 3:1), still, night after night, by the extent of his patience, of his perseverance in prayer, fed by the holy mysteries and progressing in the virtues of the Gospel, what appears to him as God's absence is not a static condition. Like Moses on Sinai, the further he

goes into the heart of the divine darkness, the more his longing reaches out, for it is the infinite and inaccessible that is the goal of his quest,[31] and it is thus that, in a paradoxical way, he makes permanent the ascension of his own holy mountain. The more he descends into the depths of his heart, covered over by dim night, the more he finds access to a higher level of the knowledge of God. He does not "see" the Bridegroom, but he "feels" His divine presence. So Saint Gregory of Nyssa explains it in speaking of the *Song of Songs:* "And now she [the soul as bride] is enveloped by the night of God, in which the Bridegroom draws near, but does not appear. How is it then that He Whom one does not see still appears in the night? By giving the soul a certain feeling of His presence."[32]

Inner prayer (νοερὰ προσευχή) does not consist in a simple, mechanical repetition of the Name of Jesus, nor does it stop at a dialogue between us and God, nor does it have as its purpose a knowledge of God in the manner of an object capable of being grasped by a subject. For such a knowledge would be characteristic of the world ruled by division and corruption. It is in just this way that the heresy of Barlaam and the Byzantine "humanists," against whom Saint Gregory Palamas struggled, falsely interpreted the teaching of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite on the divine darkness and apophatic theology.[33] Barlaam and others argued that the progress of the soul in the divine darkness consists of nothing more than a series of abstractions concerning certain reasonings about God; and, as a consequence, they envisaged the goal of the spiritual life as a "negative" knowledge, as a way of speaking that does not eliminate or supersede the distinction between subject and object. Given this argument, sanctity would not differ in any essential respect from the way our minds know the world, from an intellectual knowing.

For the hesychasts, on the contrary, for those who put into practice the teaching of the Fathers of the church, and for Saint Gregory Palamas, their great defender, the advance into divine darkness made by the one who struggles to use inner prayer is not an intellectual activity. It does not suffice to add an "a" privative in front of the names of God in order to arrive at the knowledge of Him, but rather, prayer is the way to

a union beyond sensation and intellect with the unknowable God. This is why hesychastic prayer requires soberness, the careful watching of intellect and heart in order that they not accept as knowledge of God any form or idea about Him, be it affirmative or negative. Commenting on Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, Saint Gregory Palamas wrote on this matter as follows:

> In prayer, the *nous* rejects little by little its relations with created beings, first by rejecting radically everything which is shameful, evil, or vicious, then things which are indifferent, but which are inclined to evil or to good according to the attitudes of them who put them to use, and among which are to be reckoned every kind of instruction and the knowledge which results from it. Hence the advice of the fathers not to accept, in times of prayer, any knowledge suggested by the evil one, given in order to deprive us of the better thing...[34]

Prayer consists in a "rejection of concepts," through which we allow God—the living God, and not the conceptual object of the philosophers—to reveal Himself as light in the midst of darkness, as with Moses on Sinai or the Apostles on Tabor.

"IN THE LIGHT OF YOUR FACE"

The whole ascetic life of the monk has as its goal soberness, that is, the simplification of the intellect [νοῦς] and its liberation from thoughts, concepts, or imagination, in such a way as to enable it to focus on itself, taking away from it all the world's distractions, and returning it to its natural place, the heart. When, by God's grace, this unitary state of the human person created in the image of God is restored, then the intellect can progress without obstacle toward pure prayer. But, the latter is not the end of the spiritual life. The end of prayer, according to the Holy Fathers, is the ravishing of the intellect in the Lord,[35] and the illumination of grace through which man becomes himself light and, by adoption, god. Within the abyss of the heart, during the night, the intellect

of the monk is progressively purified and made transparent, in order that it be enabled to receive the light, like a crystal. It is then that the monk may await the visitation of grace. In the same text, Saint Gregory pursues this theme:

> Thus in leaving things behind, even little by little its ties with the best of them, the intellect leaves all existent things completely behind. This ecstasy is distinguished as far superior to the theology that operates through negative reductions. It is the privilege of those who have been clothed with impassibility. But, this is still not union, in that the Paraclete has not yet come from on high to illumine the man of prayer who stands at the very limit of his natural capacities, as in a high room, awaiting the promise of the Father, that through that revelation He might bear him away in order to bring him to the contemplation of the light.[36]

In this manner, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the mind is lifted above its own limits and crosses over the boundaries of prayer. Thus Saint Isaac the Syrian: "The intellect is lifted above prayer, and it is not fitting that this state be called prayer; rather, it is the engendering of pure prayer which is conveyed by the Holy Spirit. The intellect then no longer prays by way of offering prayer, but is transported in ecstasy to the heart of inaccessible reality. Here, indeed, is the ignorance that surpasses knowledge."[37]

In times of prayer the intellect becomes like sapphire, or the color of the sky, as the same saint writes, but when the Holy Spirit is poured out from above, it becomes more resplendent than the sun, such as was the face of Christ on Tabor. Then the mystery of the monk's personal transfiguration is accomplished, his intellect has been changed by this "beautiful transformation," and he is made a participant in the divine nature, he has acquired "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), become the "place of God," and "through God, he looks on God."[38]

At the beginning of the feast of the Transfiguration, the church exhorts all the faithful to allow themselves to be thus mystically transformed, so as to live in spiritual manner the mystery of the feast. "Come, let us rejoice, mounting up from the earth to highest contemplation of the virtues: let us be transformed this day into a better state and direct our minds to heavenly things, being shaped anew in piety according to the form of Christ.

For in His mercy the Savior of our souls has transfigured disfigured man and made him shine with light upon Mount Tabor."[39]

The inaccessible light of the countenance of the God-man which threw the Disciples to the ground, the splendor even of the Kingdom of Heaven which I admire in the liturgical assembly, now becomes my own light, shining from my heart like another sun: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of the darkness,' Who has shown in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6)

The Fathers call this deifying energy of grace "enhypostatized illumination,"[40] in order to emphasize that it is the uncreated and substantial energy of God, the common life and glory of the Holy Trinity that is yet communicated in a personal manner *from* the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit to a free and concrete human person. It does not force me. It does not constrain me. Rather, it transfigures me in the light, such that Christ is enabled to live in me in power, and such that I, in this communion, acquire the attributes of God Himself. In contrast, however, to the splendor of Tabor, the grace of deification is an habitual condition (ἕξις, *habitus*), a permanent and dynamic process which, in Christ, never ceases to transfigure me. The Apostle writes: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord Who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

This radiance is not the object of either a vision or an intellection, but it proceeds from within us, from the depths of the heart, a light in the midst of the night such as was attested to by Saint Symeon the New Theologian, he who, after several "outward" appearances of light

by grace of his spiritual father and of Christ, at last saw the Lord in the light of the Holy Spirit—inwardly—during the night, while sitting alone in the dimness of his cell:

> I thank you that you, even when I was sitting in darkness, revealed yourself to me, you enlightened me, you granted me to see the light of your countenance that is unbearable to all.
>
> I remained seated in the middle of darkness, I know, but while I was there surrounded by darkness you appeared as light, illuminating me completely from your total light.
>
> And I became light in the night, I who was found in the midst of darkness...
>
> Likewise I am in the light, yet I am found in the middle of the darkness.
>
> So I am in the darkness, yet still I am in the middle of the light...
>
> O awesome wonder which I see doubly, with my two sets of eyes, of the body and of the soul![41]

The light of Tabor, the Transfiguration of Christ, was therefore the image of my own deification. While, before the Cross, the Apostles saw it for only an instant and were then covered by the cloud, in order later to be initiated into the mystery of God, now, after the Cross—or, better, while living the Cross in the night's obscurity and the struggle of prayer—man can become all light, all eye, all glory, all a face in the Holy Spirit.[42] "Now [at Tabor] this body which had not yet assumed all our bodies and which possessed in itself the source of the light of grace shone from outside on those who were worthy of approaching it, and communicated the illumination to them through their physical eyes to the inner parts of their soul. But now, since He has mingled Himself with us and abides within us, it is right that He should illumine our souls from within."[43]

This is the reason for which several saints were reckoned worthy of appearing to their disciples with the splendor of the sun, such as Abba

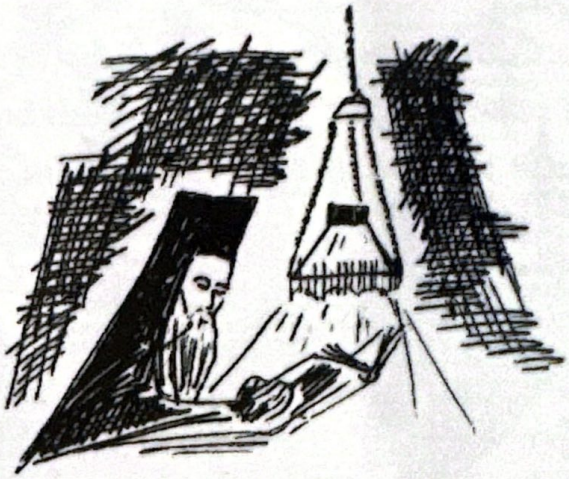
Sisoes before his falling-asleep,[44] or Saint Seraphim of Sarov in the course of his famous conversation with Motovilov,[45] in order to show them a foretaste of the glory of the saints in the Kingdom that is to come.

This genuine transfiguration of the saints, whose witness is the tradition of the Church, comprises the consolation, the help, and the support of the monk in his struggles. And even if he remains for years in the darkness, even if the high peak of Athos does not send for him a ray of Christ's transfigured presence, he can nonetheless persevere, extending his struggle and crying with a still louder voice, because he has the assurance of a testimony of experience from so many Athonite saints who, on this mountain, have seen the light and have become themselves lamps of the Holy Spirit. He recalls Saint Athanasius, patriarch of the Athonites, who at Melana endured a year of terrible struggle with *accidie* (spiritual aridity), and had come near despair when, suddenly, "a heavenly light shone around him enveloped him with light, and made him himself light, and the dark cloud of his struggle was lifted from him."[46] From the moment he received the permanent charism of compunction, "and whenever he wished, he streamed with effortless tears." He recalls as well Saint Euthymius the Georgian (+980), to whom we alluded in the beginning, who contemplated the light of the Transfiguration at the summit of Athos. He knows well of Saint Simon the Myrrh-flowing (+ ca. 1255) who, on several occasions saw the uncreated light shine within his cave and, finally, the star of Bethlehem standing above the crag where God wished him to build his monastery.[47] In the wonderful Life of Saint Gregory the Sinaite (+1330) the monk can read that not only the soul and body of the saint, but his cell and the world around it shared in his own transfiguration: "His soul and heart were aflame with the energy of the All-Holy and perfect Spirit, and—changed as he was by a strange and wonderful transformation—all his dwelling was also filled with light by the radiance of grace, and he saw as in a mirror the whole creation bright with light."[48] How can he not recall as well Saint Gregory Palamas, whose face was all light when he would come from the Divine Liturgy, or from his cell?[49] Or how can he not think of Saint

Sabas of Vatopedi (+ ca. 1330) who saw the uncreated light so often in his ecstasies, and who, on the day of the Transfiguration, appeared all radiant with light to his disciple and biographer, Saint Philotheus, who writes: "I saw him with a glorified countenance and filled with an extraordinary joy and brightness, as if he were already enjoying the Transfiguration of the Lord and the vision of God"?[50] How can he not admire, too, Saint Acacius the Kavsocalyvite (+ ca. 1799) from whose mouth fire came forth and whose face became brilliant as the sun whenever he prayed: he who saw Christ many times through the transfigured perception that the Holy Spirit had accorded him?[51]

To these lamps of times past one may add the stars of our days: Saint Silouan of Athos (+1938) whose teaching illumines so many souls immersed in the darkness of the world,[52] Callinicus of Katounakia (+1930) whose face shone like that of Moses following three days of transport in the divine light,[53] the Staretz Joseph the Hesychast (+1959), great athlete of the prayer of the heart, whom the Lord comforted in his afflictions with astounding visions,[54] or Father Augustine the Russian (+1965) who had no need of a lamp to see at night and who was so simple and humble that he believed everyone looked on the world, as he did, in the light of God, and how many other men, bearers of the light, live today on the Holy Mountain in self-effacement, but whose prayer unseen illumines the world like a column of fire!

Thus, even if the Athonite monk lives in the darkness, he has no reason to feel afflicted, because this light that transfigures and deifies the soul and body of the saints, this energy of the Holy Spirit, is even the bond and life of the Church The shining forth of the saints is our common inheritance, their glory the substance of our joy. It is thus in this joy, and with the hope of having "more clearly" a part in the light of the Savior's face then, when all mirrors shall pass away (1 Cor. 13:10–12), that the monk pursues his journey toward the heavenly Jerusalem, living out day by day in the common life with his brothers the prefiguration of glory, and celebrating without pause the feast of his own transfiguration within the bright cloud of his heart.



Part Five

Saint Herman of Alaska: Athos in America, and America's Gift to Athos

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

—*Psalm 116:15*

OUR CONCLUDING SECTION offers an eyewitness account of the events around the recent gift of a relic of Saint Herman of Alaska to the women's monastery at Ormylia, and the two sermons given in honor of the saint by Abbot Aemilianos introducing him, as it were, to the Greek faithful. We find in these documents a natural conclusion to this book. The reader has gone on pilgrimage to Athos with Father Placide, has listened to the voices, both ancient and contemporary, of the Holy Mountain, and, in the abbot's talks, has received a remarkable and profound explanation of Athos's meaning for the life of the Church. Now, in Saint Herman, we invite the reader to the discovery that the tradition of Athos has in the past traveled from Russian to the American continent where, in the living memory of the saint, it is still very much at work.

The translation of Saint Herman's relic to the monastery at Ormylia is therefore at once our gift to the Holy Mountain and a true homecoming. This saint is proof of our own link to Athos and, through the latter, to the unfailing springs of the Orthodox tradition. He is also sign and substance of the Church's essential unity, of her catholicity. We too easily forget, divided as we are among our differing "jurisdictions," that the Orthodox is also the Catholic Church of Christ, the God-intended home of all humanity. Here, though, we find a Greek abbot explaining

to Greek believers the life, and venerating the relics, of a Russian-born monk who was a missionary to the Aleut people and canonized as the first saint of the American land. Saint Herman has truly, in Father Aemilianos's words, "reached out and united the very ends of the inhabited earth." Athos and America met in him and, in that meeting, we are led to discern the Church universal, ever adapting herself to the different cultures and languages of humankind, ever the life-giving and creative presence of the Spirit, ancient yet eternally renewed. We need, to be sure, more Saint Hermans, other and contemporary witnesses to the monastic and catholic tradition of the Church. He himself foresaw this and predicted a monastery on the island where he had spent his life. We should honor him by praying that his predictions will swiftly be fulfilled, and that the heritage of the Holy Mountain will find its expression in our own day and in our own land.

12

Reception in Greece of the Relics of Saint Herman of Alaska

by a monk of the Monastery of Simonos Petras

Greece is a land of Orthodox Christians whose history goes back to apostolic times. It is a place where one may find great zeal for Jesus Christ. It is here that the Apostle Paul was rewarded, to his great joy, with the vitality and love of growing churches. In the Northeastern region of the country, called Macedonia, many great churches and monasteries were founded over the centuries. The spearhead of Orthodox Christian monasticism is also to be found in this area: Mount Athos. Here are the roots of the great monasteries of Rumania, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Russia. Here spiritual elders direct their disciples in the virtues of monasticism and inner prayer. Time after time throughout the history of the past millennium, the monks of Athos and their prayers sowed the seeds of monastic virtue throughout the Orthodox *ecumene* and raised up Christian nations. Like Saint Paul, prayer was their weapon. Theirs was the best and most enduring missionary work. This is why, when churches are established, so are monasteries. When churches abound, so do monasteries. This is why the Aleut people, in far off Alaska, successfully became mighty in their faith, because they saw before them a living example of monastic life in the holy monk, Herman. They saw a life aflame with the Spirit, a perfected Christianity. This is how, too, the attention of so many faithful throughout the world has been drawn to a little hermitage on Spruce Island, near Kodiak, a hermitage that has become a true light in the world.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE RELICS

It was one such elder, the Abbot Aemilianos of the monastery of Simonos Petras, who from an early age had heard stories of a most remarkable and wonder-working saint in the far north, and who had cherished hopes of one day being somehow united with this great northern ascetic. (This knowledge and longing, incidentally, was most remarkable in itself since, prior to his canonization in 1970, Saint Herman was virtually unknown outside of Alaska, even in the United States.) In his constant zeal for Christian monastic virtues, the abbot Aemilianos is a major force behind the monastic revival in Greece. He is the abbot of five monasteries: Simonos Petras on Mount Athos, the monastery of the Holy Annunciation in Ormylia, Greece, the monasteries of Saint Anthony the Great and the Protection of the Mother of God in Saint Laurent, France, and the monastery of the Transfiguration in Murel, France. A charismatic speaker, gifted with insight and love, he is exemplary in the ascetic life. His appearance, love, and kindness attest to how he lives and what he teaches.

His longing of many years came to fruition when His Beatitude, Theodosius, Archbishop of Washington and Metropolitan of America and Canada, consented to bestow a portion of the relics of Saint Herman on a monastery capable of becoming a pilgrimage center for the saint in Greece and Europe. The Holy Annunciation Monastery at Ormylia, in the province of Chalcidice not far from Thessalonica, was chosen as the site. It is a large, newly constructed women's monastery of over one hundred nuns, headed by the capable and spiritual Abbess, Nikodimi. The community is a center of spiritual enlightenment and social witness known throughout the region and, increasingly, throughout Greece as well as Europe and America. It has the advantage of being accessible to both men and women, since Mount Athos is closed to the latter. Since it is a dependency of Simonos Petras, however, its worship and traditions are entirely Athonite. Many of its nuns are conversant in languages other than Greek and are therefore capable of receiving and assisting pilgrims from abroad as well as believers from the area. The monastery, indeed, resembles Saint Herman's own original monastery

of Valaam in its size, in the beauty and splendor of its worship, and in the care put into its construction. It is a kind of contemporary miracle, new and yet faithfully reflecting the ancient faith, to the glory of God.

The abbot sent one of his disciples to represent himself and the brotherhood of Simonos Petras at the vigil-pilgrimage for the saint at Kodiak, Alaska. There the legate was warmly received by local believers and by the Archbishop of Washington who, together with Bishop Clement of the Church in Russia and Bishop Gregory of Sitka and Alaska, preached on Saint Herman and the angelic life of monasticism. Aleut believers were present in great numbers, fervent in their enthusiasm. They had come from many different regions of Alaska, often traveling hundreds of miles from villages virtually unknown to the rest of the world. That year, 1987, the celebration formed part of the observance of the millennium of the Baptism of Russia, and a tide of pilgrims from all parts of the world converged on the little hermitage where a humble monk had once lived some two hundred years before. After the conclusion of the festivities, and after he had bid farewell to all in Alaska, the abbot's disciple was summoned to the archbishop's residence in Syosset, New York. There, on August 21, 1987—the very name's day of Abbot Aemilianos on the Old Calendar—the right tibia of Saint Herman was presented to him together with a letter of verification. His Beatitude was filled with deep emotion. He charged the monk to guard the relic carefully and underscored his own interest in the saint's monastic virtues. The archpastor poured out his love and blessings, speaking of his own monastic vocation and his visit to the Holy Mountain many years before. Had it not been for the great burden of his position and the needs of his flock, he would surely have come himself to greet the faithful of Greece with the answer to their request for the saint's relics.

THE RELICS' ARRIVAL IN GREECE, AND THEIR RECEPTION AT ORMYLIA

Immediately on arriving in Greece, the disciple telephoned the eagerly awaiting monastery in Ormylia. Instead of the usual pleasantries typical of such moments in Greece, he was greeted instead with: "When will

you get here? Was the Archbishop kind to us? Are the blessings of Saint Herman with us?" Confronted by this outburst, the disciple forgot for the moment that he had not slept for over a day and half and agreed to hurry directly to the monastery. God be glorified for the strength He gives his servants! That morning, September 4, 1987, marked the official reception of the relics of Saint Herman at the Monastery of the Holy Annunciation. Very solemnly, two representatives of the Abbess Nikodimi greeted, at the main gate, the travel-weary monk, bearing his precious gift from North America. Quietly and full of respect they escorted him to the main reception hall. Although everything seemed very normal, a kind of enthusiasm and excitement pervaded the atmosphere. The abbess herself was waiting in the hall together with the monastery chaplain, Father Serapion, to greet their emissary. Both were full of questions about the pilgrimage and the welfare of the Orthodox Church in America. Shuffling feet could be heard outside the hall. Messengers came to and fro within it. Finally, the abbess drew herself up, collected her feelings, and asked with some uncertainty: "How has his Eminence, the Archbishop, blessed us?" Like Zaccheus, the little publican who had gone out of his way to climb the tree for a glimpse of our Lord and was rewarded with Christ's own presence in his home, so too were the abbess and the chaplain overcome with awe as the relic was drawn from its velvet sheath. They fell to their knees before so great and fragrant a relic. Truly, the wise archpastor had been inspired by the Holy Spirit in so blessing this flock, this nation of Orthodox believers, with Saint Herman's presence. As the abbess and those present finished their venerations, the sound of bells, many bells, filled the usually quiet monastery court. Incense and candles, singing, and the shuffling of many feet, gazing and gentle pushing greeted one outside the hall. That first sense of a charged and excited atmosphere proved to be a hidden flood of nuns, priests, and layfolk who, it turned out, had been gathering in increasing numbers to welcome and glorify their new saint since the arrival of the abbot's legate back in Greece. There was truly joy among the angels in heaven and in all those who were present. Nor could anyone conceal his or her tears of joy. The saint's troparion, "O joyful North

Star of Christ's holy Church..." sounded even more splendid and radiant in Greek than in English. They sang it while climbing the many steps up and up to the chapel of Mary Magdalene where finally they halted before the relics. Chandeliers were swung in the Athonite fashion. Incense was thick in the air. The litanies were sung: "Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison," over and over, on everyone's lips. Two by two, quietly and in order, all went up to greet and venerate the saint. After all that is pleasing in God's eyes had finished, the relic on its silver tray was removed to the chapel's sanctuary. Everyone then gathered in the great hall of assembly where they were told the details of the disciple's journey and pilgrimage.

A few days later, the whole story was told all over again to a very eager gathering of monks at the Monastery of Simonos Petras on Mount Athos. Saint Herman has been regularly celebrated at this monastery since 1981. The Fathers had come to embrace and love the saint and his great deeds. So much so, indeed, that they had composed a complete, all-night vigil service to him in the Byzantine style. This writer cherishes the hope that one day at least part of the book, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality* edited by Father Michael Oleksa and published in America by Paulist Press, will be made available in Greek for the faithful of Greece. May God speed and enable those who would take on this project!

THE FIRST VIGIL TO ST. HERMAN AT ORMYLIA

The time came, on December 10, 1987, when all was readied. The relic was placed in an intricately carved reliquary bearing the saint's icon on the inside cover. The music was rehearsed and the readings practiced. That night the angels themselves were present along with the multitudes of people who filled the little chapel to overflowing and beyond. The very halls of the building were filled with clergy and nuns, friends and friends of friends, and those, too, who had come just to see and hear of this American saint. All came to pray before the saint of the north. The choir sang the newly-written verses with all solemnity. The chandeliers were swung again. The censers were well-stocked with perfumes

and the clergy richly vested for the feast which would go on all night. In the morning, the abbot himself presided over the Divine Liturgy. Very many took communion that day. According to the tradition of Athos, a banquet was set out in honor of the saint directly following the liturgy, and what a banquet! All who came were filled and refreshed. Cheers and congratulations were exchanged throughout the day. God was truly glorified in His saint!

THE RELICS ARE VENERATED AT MIKROCASTRO IN NORTHERN GREECE

One would think that after such festivities matters would come to a halt. They did not. Late on the morning of December 11, 1987, just an hour or two following the previous night's vigil, the zealous abbot took the relics and a delegation of priests and monks on a trip through northern Greece. All that day they passed through the ancient cities and plain country villages that line the high and winding roads far into the beautiful northern borderlands of Greece. Approaching the monastery dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God in Mikrocastro, they could see clearly in the light of dusk the white frost outlining the grass in the glens and rimming the last, still-persisting leaves that clung to the otherwise barren trees. A brisk, northern breeze greeted them as they passed through the broad and tidy courtyard fronting the monastery. The community is one dedicated to the helping of orphaned and disabled children. On hearing about the great love Saint Herman had for his own orphaned Aleut children, the abbot had requested Abbot Aemilianos to come and bless them all with the saint's relics. Abbot Stephen, the superior there, greeted the delegation with great hospitality and kindness. They were met with tea and refreshments and then given rooms in the hostel for a brief, two-hour rest before beginning their second all-night vigil in as many days.

During that short rest a transformation was underway outside. One could hear hushed voices, the soft step and shuffle of many feet, doors opening and closing. When the monastery bells finally rang in joyous harmony, His Grace Anthony of Siatista, accompanied by the Abbot

Stephen and his brotherhood, greeted our zealous Abbot Aemilianos, carrying the holy relics, and his delegation in the hall of the hostel. As they were escorted out of the hostel through the wide courtyard, they were confronted by a sea of people, all bowing toward the relics of Saint Herman. In the short time since the delegation's arrival at the monastery, cars and buses had found parking in the frosty glens and horse-drawn buggies had been tethered to the barren trees. Very many, it turned out, had been waiting for this night. All of the people had been told well in advance of the historic event; announcements in churches and shops and squares had gone out beforehand. Thus there were buses from country villages, buses from the big cities, automobiles from all over, and horse carts from close by. Men and women, young and old, they had all come to pray.

Taking into consideration this multitude, the Abbot ordered that the relic be brought out at the beginning of the vigil instead of at the usual time following the Doxology at the end of matins. It was just before the relic was brought forth that he spoke in a firm, loud voice so that as many as possible could hear.

> Today we celebrate a great and marvelous saint [Saint Spiridon of Corphu, whose day this actually was], a saint who by his prayers and the grace of the Holy Spirit could stop the flow of rivers and raise the dead to life... so devoted to his flock that one could not distinguish the pastor from the sheep...
>
> But today, my beloved, we have a special blessing. We have the opportunity to open our hearts, to kneel in worship and find the grace of God. Today we have with us the most precious relic of a newer saint, one who fell asleep and was glorified only one hundred and fifty years ago. We remember Saint Spiridon every year and will continue to do so. Now, however, today, we honor especially our new Saint Herman of Alaska, one whose grace is truly great. Today, we have a singularly large relic of him. It is the only large portion of him in Greece, and given now to us. It is

> full of God's grace. I am sure that Saint Spiridon will not mind or misunderstand our singing first the *troparia* to Saint Herman and then his own. He will instead rejoice in the remembrance of his newer brother. As the angels concelebrate and rejoice with Saint Spiridon, so will he and the angels concelebrate with Saint Herman, and all together they will glorify God.

In his hour and a half introduction of Saint Herman to these people of Greece, Abbot Aemilianos outlined the life of this humble monastic saint, a life whose obedience, humility, and ascetic virtue is exemplary for contemporary monks as well. Tears fell on many cheeks and sniffling was heard in the throng of people as the abbot stressed the hardships that befell the blessed Herman and his flock, the Aleut people. When this formal introduction had been completed, the mass of people watched closely as the precious relic was escorted from the sanctuary by a long file of richly-vested clergy. One had to marvel at the numbers of priests and monks, each officially representing his monastery or diocese. In orderly manner, two by two, the clergy knelt three times and venerated the relic. Then, just before the last of the clergy had finished their venerations, the abbot called one of his monks and sternly ordered him to guard the saint: "I leave the relic in your charge; see to it that your eyes never leave it!" The American reader, perhaps familiar with the nice, tidy ways of religion in the United States, may well wonder, "Is there any reason to suspect any harm could come to the relics?" The answer became clear immediately. As soon as the last priest had left, a sea of people surged forward. Wave after wave pressed upon the little table holding the relic as each believer pushed forward to kiss the new saint. It was hard even to hold on to the table as these waves dashed and broke against it. Other monks came quickly to help secure the table and reliquary while still others swept the gifts, piles of jewelry and money, into bags [for support of the orphanage]. Many rubbed their tear-washed cheeks before they kissed, others wiped their scarves or prayer cards on the relic before they reverenced it, and still others glued their lips to it for the blessing that was surely theirs. Litany after

litany, Psalm after Psalm, verse after verse were sung and read, and still the waves kept rolling in. God alone knew how many had been waiting outside of the large church, out in the cold dark night, for their turn to salute the new saint.

At one point something wonderful occurred that is worth special mention. Close to morning, a young child came with his grandmother for his turn to venerate the holy relic. His grandmother helped him put his three fingers together and make the sign of the cross. The crowd, seeing what effort it took for him to make his cross, subsided for a moment in order to watch. The child kissed the relic as his grandmother gently pushed his head down to touch it. It was then, just as he was being led away, that the little boy wrestled his arm free and clutched the entire relic in both hands. His grandmother was in shock and the eyes of the watching multitude widened in disbelief. As if drawn by a voice only he could hear, the child responded first of all with a smile, and then placed his cheek on the relic and caressed it softly. The crowd held his grandmother back from snatching him away. Smiling, the little boy spoke joyfully to the saint in a language intelligible only to the two of them, all the while stroking tenderly the whole reliquary. An unearthly quiet fell on the crown, their eyes glued to the scene. The love Saint Herman showed his beloved Aleut children was wonderfully revealed as the love he has for all. Thousands saw it, and thousands left with the unforgettable sight still in their hearts. Then, as freely as the child had taken the relic, he set it down and rejoined his grandmother to disappear back into the throng. The siege of waves came back with redoubled force. The First Hour, Divine Liturgy, the Prayers of Thanksgiving went by and still the people came. It was only after most of the clergy had left and the lights had long been turned off that that great sea finally subsided and withdrew. The relic was solemnly escorted back to the car that was filled with monks, and they returned again to Saint Herman's new home in Ormylia. As the car approached the gate of the monastery, there stood the Abbess Nikodimi, in the very same spot where they had seen her on leaving. She had kept her own vigil there, where her eyes had last seen Saint Herman's reliquary in the abbot's hands. One simply

has to marvel at such love and devotion, and praise God with heart and soul for such fervent Christianity.

AT THE CHURCH OF ST. CHARALAMPUS, THESSALONICA

On December 16, 1987, only four days after the moving vigil at Mikrocastro, the abbot chose to speak and to celebrate vigil at Saint Charalampus, the monastery's *metochion* church in Thessalonica. He had given notice of the event a month in advance to the Faculty of Theology at the University of Thessalonica. This time the participants at the vigil were university professors, teachers, clergy, and students, along with a significant number of prominent townspeople. There were hundreds standing outside in the cold courtyard when the vigil started. Once again, there was no room in the church for so many people. It was just as Vespers had finished that the abbot chose to speak. Aware of our society's weaknesses, he stressed the faith and apostolic mission of Saint Herman and the monks whom he had accompanied on the mission to Alaska. These qualities show us the way today.

> Faith and love was the path of Jesus Christ. It was the path of the Apostles, and the saints right up to the present day. By such were mountains moved, the sick healed, and the dead raised up. If one believes in Christ, one must also believe in the latter miracles. Great suffering was overcome by faith. In prisons, in chains, in grotesque tortures, in deserts, and in daily life it was faith that sustained them and won for them all a crown of victory and life everlasting.

The abbot called on the clergy and the young graduates of theology, as well as everyone present, to gird themselves with the same apostolic faith and fervor, to offer their lives truly and willingly in the service of Jesus Christ. He pointed to Saint Herman's example of the monastic life as the most perfect way, the way that comes closest to the angels and, indeed, is called the angelic life:

> This is what Saint Herman chose and what enabled him to not seek glory or earthly gifts. He did not go out to find crowds of people to preach to. Rather, he stayed in his little hut... his little monastery, and spoke only to those who asked him for guidance and assistance. It was his daily monastic life, the one that he spent in prayer and in humility, that was the voice, the power behind the conversion to light of those who were in darkness. This was why they remained so firm in their convictions and why, in spite of abuse from their European [and, later, American] overlords, they became themselves pillars of the Church.

Then, reminding his listeners of the first martyr of America, the hieromonk Juvenaly, the abbot stressed:

> Also being a monastic, Saint Juvenaly was firm in his faith and rose from the dead to follow his slayers. This is mission! This is the faith that builds the Church! This is love for God! We are to be firm in the faith and not to sway here and there, to give way to heretics and their mistaken ways, nor to fall to the pressure of civil leaders who only look out for their own good. May the great mercy of God preserve us!

On concluding his introduction to Saint Herman, a sermon of over an hour, the abbot continued with the rest of the vigil. There was the same Byzantine splendor as before, but unlike the earlier occasion in Mikrocastro, the veneration of the relic was much more orderly. The vigil ended in the early morning with light enough to see by. Once more, on the return of Saint Herman to his new home in Ormylia, the abbot's party found the Abbess Nikodimi standing in the place where they had left her on their departure. She had again kept vigil until the saint's return. Incredible!

CONCLUSION

Throughout the following year and to the present the relic of Saint Herman has been used in the monastery for the monthly blessing of water. He is called upon for the curing of the sick domestic animals neighboring people bring to the monastery for prayers. Alaska is no strange and unknown land in the area around Ormylia. Everyone there can tell you who Saint Herman is and about his grace-filled deeds. The major feast for him is celebrated on December 14, one day after his falling asleep.[1] This is due to the great popularity of Saint Spiridon, celebrated on the 12th, and of the five martyrs commemorated on the 13th. The three day succession of feasts, however, creates such a splendid festival that many are attracted to it. Because of their great love for these saints, many make arrangements months in advance to reserve space in the monastery hostel in order to spend these three holy days in the company of the angels, the saints, and the sisters.

Saint Herman is celebrated on the 9th of August at Simonos Petras, and also at the three monasteries in France. At the Monastery of the Transfiguration there, a special commemoration of the Baptism of Russia was arranged in 1988; it was so planned as to conclude on Saint Herman's day. The life and deeds of the missionary monk were thus part, indeed the climax, of the retreat's instruction, and they aroused great interest.

The present year, 1989, sees already a number of vigils scheduled an honor of the saint. The most eagerly awaited is the vigil planned for Athens. While the date is still tentative, great interest is already being shown in the University of Athens.

In bringing all these events to the reader's attention our intent is to show the boundless mercy and unlimited grace of God in His saints. Confined neither by languages nor by civil boundaries, the saints work miracles for those who are devoted in their faith. They recall people to the remembrance that God is everywhere. He is ever present and active in His saints. They are not just names filling the blanks in the *troparia* we sing every day. They are real, for they partake of God Who is real. Like their Master, they are alive and at work.

13

First Sermon in Honor of Saint Herman of Alaska

TODAY, MY BELOVED, we have a special blessing.* We have the opportunity to open our hearts, to kneel in worship and find the grace of God. Today we have with us the most precious relic of a newer saint, one who fell asleep and was glorified only one hundred and fifty years ago. This saint was a wonderful ascetic, a true monk. He was also a missionary and miracle worker. We have brought him to our country, here to Macedonia, from far away. Yet he is close to us. He blesses us and brings us joy. Today we shall be amazed at this saint. We shall converse with him, and he in turn will bless and sanctify us.

We have brought him, beloved, from faraway Alaska, from the most northern regions of America. There, as we know, the ice often covers both land and sea. There, in Alaska, where there are some hundred and fifty volcanic islands, they bear witness to the power, the memory, and the holiness of Saint Herman who was laid to rest there like the dawn. You know that in those parts the long nights can last for six months and are illumined only a little by the northern lights. And the days of the rest of the year are most often dim and cloudy—like the day we saw today while travelling here in the fog. We could barely see in front of our car.

This is what the other months are like in the daylight hours. Do you know how many sunny days the inhabitants there have in the whole year? While nearly all our days are sunny, there they have only twelve days when they see the sun. Well, it is just there, to those hard lands, that Saint Herman chose to go.

*Given at the Monastery of the Dormition, Mikrocastro, in the diocese of Siatista, on December 12, 1987.

We honor Saint Spiridon every year and will always do so. Now, however, today, we will honor especially our new saint, Herman of Alaska, whose grace is also truly great. We have brought with us a very large portion of his relics. It is the only such large portion outside of Alaska and it was given exclusively to us. We shall venerate this relic which is flowing with grace and so shall be pleasing to God, shall ourselves be blessed because we have discerned in it the life of the saint. And, from this point on in the service, we shall sing first of all the *troparion* of Saint Herman and afterwards that of Saint Spiridon. But I don't think that Saint Spiridon will be upset or misunderstand. He will rejoice at the honor we show to his younger brother. Just as he concelebrates with the angels, so now will he sing and glorify God with Saint Herman, who was also himself accustomed to seeing the angels of God ascending and descending, and of singing together with them. So then, both the angels and the saints, and in particular our two saints, are here with us and shall moisten our hearts with the dew of that grace that they have from God.

THE HISTORY OF THE ALASKAN MISSION

Alaska, as you know, was discovered [by Europeans] not so many years ago. We learn of it first around 1730. Before, it was quite unknown. Something wonderful happened not long after its discovery: Christianity was brought to the region, specifically the Orthodox faith. How had the same originally come to Rome? How did it come to so many places? The first Christians who came and were interested there, as in many places, were merchants. Here, too, Russian merchants came to America. It was they who took the first steps and on one of those hundred and fifty islands, on the one called Kodiak, they built an Orthodox Church. They built a school, too, and then tried and succeeded in bringing missionaries as well. These merchants were hunters of the wild animals of land and sea. They were fur traders and consequently had a certain relationship with these territories where the fur trade was profitable. There they hunted bear for their wild pelts; they hunted the skins of ermines for kings to wear and for queens to adorn their robes. They

hunted the fur seals and other animals, such as the sea otters that swim the sea's breadth and whose fur is the most beautiful of all. It was these merchants who thus made a beginning. They accomplished something great! Missionary work was terribly difficult there. Many drowned in the sea before they even arrived. Imagine those winters and the temperatures dropping as low as 62 degrees below zero, and the ice presenting a daily problem—as much to apostles as to other men!

The first church there was the church of the Three Hierarchs, which stands to the present day and which, indeed, was recently adorned with icons in the Byzantine style prepared here in nearby monasteries. They also built another church, dedicated to the Resurrection, in another harbor in order for mission work to progress. And, very recently in 1959, a Greek church was erected as well. Where don't the Greeks end up?!

A DIFFICULT TIME FOR THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA

In order for you to grasp the worthiness of these missionaries, and in particular of Saint Herman, I would like first of all to tell you about what kind of an historical period he was living in from the time he was born right up to the point where he became a missionary. Saint Herman was like a kind of blossom or fruit of grace that grew up from a root in dry and difficult ground. How was the ground dry? Because not long before him, there was a king, Peter the Great, who was a rationalist and had been influenced by Protestant, especially German Protestant, examples, and who had transferred this thinking, the spirit of Protestantism, to his empire and to the Church. This is significant. When emperors, when rulers do not feel secure on seeing that there is a Church that is one and eternal, whereas their government is always being tested, when rulers want to govern everything, then it is natural for them to try to spoil the Church's integrity, the integrity of her bishops, her clergy, and generally the authority of her laws. What do such people usually do? They try to become "reformers," even agents of "renewal." They demand freedom of religion, that is, that there be no established religion. Why?

Because at heart they want somehow to hide beneath this blanket their persecution of the Church.

And later, after Peter, we find Catherine "the Great"—as she is called. She, too, had the same attitude, and she ruled even more strictly according to a rationalistic system. And so there were still more changes, more reforms. The state tried to adjust the Church in order to make it more approachable and popular for the people. They changed the government of the Church and created a new "Synod"—the very same system that later our own kings, influenced as well by Germany, brought to us after we had won our independence from the Turks.

So, nothing was favorable for a saint. They closed most of the monasteries and they tried, as much as possible, to reduce the numbers of the few monks that remained. Secularization blew through the country like a kind of whirlwind. We might say that such times remind us of the Lord's saying: "Now is the judgment of this world." However, in as many places as this did happen (since it also occurred in France and in other countries—indeed, everywhere), all the ancient customs were put to the test. Yet, it is still true that the Church really suffers nothing at all. Her people are always focused on Christ and the saints. Now, the state went after monasticism in particular, and it does so every time it wants to diminish the Church. Why? Because monasticism is like a living river whose streams fill men's souls with healing currents. It makes them aware of God, of heaven, of the universe of the saints. Monasticism is that which always brings genuine renewal to the Church, brings the recovery of ancient and forgotten ways.

Our Church therefore fears neither the times nor their difficulties. She fears neither corruption nor even death, and her daily life is always and fervently missionary.

SAINT HERMAN'S EARLY LIFE: THE MISSIONARY CHOOSES MONASTICISM

Our saint was born and grew up in a difficult period. But his heart was in the grip of the Church's spirit. His own spirit prized her as its support. Paradise was at work in him, and for that reason his mind was

that of the Fathers, spiritual, and his spirit was completely that of the Church. And he knew that if he wanted to spread Orthodoxy, and if he wanted himself to become rich, that he would have to make himself small. If he wanted to become rich in the good things of God, then he himself would have to become poor. If he wanted to be first in the Kingdom of Heaven, he would be last here below. And thus, precisely for these reasons, he became a missionary and chose as his plan and method of missionary work not programs, not learned arguments, not worldly standards, but instead silence and the desert, silence and prayer. He had learned this from the Apostle Paul who, when Christ called him to go bring the message of the Gospel to the gentiles, disappeared for almost eleven years in the deserts and in seclusion in order there to absorb the Holy Spirit and so have something to give to people. His prayer was his mightiest weapon. Fellowship with God was its result.

Thus because he had chosen the apostolic life—a thought that Christ Himself had placed in him—Saint Herman sought for mission within his monastic robe. He preferred to demonstrate what our Church tells us, that monasticism is the best kind of missionary work, and thus that whenever the churches grow it is because they are rich in monasteries, and that when they have monasteries they grow, and the people sense that they walk no longer on the earth but are lifted to the heights between heaven and earth. The ways of mission are revealed within monasticism.

So, Saint Herman was moved to give himself to God. At what age? Sixteen years! He was a boy of sixteen when he became a monk at the monastery of Saint Sergius in Russia. There he remained, in the monastery of his conversion, for five or six years, and then he left for another place where he could go more deeply into the wilderness. He went to a hermitage that was itself named for Saint Sergius and which belonged—note this!—to a famous monastery that had been founded by two Athonites, one called Sergius and the other Herman. It is the same way elsewhere in the Orthodox world, in Russia, Rumania, Serbia. Wherever you go you will see the ancient footprints of the Athonite way.

From infancy Saint Herman bore his cross. As little children almost all of us start out the same way. But we forget ourselves on the way. We are dragged off course by chasing after vanities and silly opinions. We are pulled down by possessions and so lose the years of our life. He, though, did not do so, but instead threw himself into his retreat.

So he went to a new monastery, as I was saying, and there he submitted to an abbot who was himself a real saint. A saint will always bring forth holy children. He had this man as his guide and protector. My beloved, Saint Herman lived among the dark forests and on feast days would go to the monastery. His assigned job was the same as the first Apostles of Christ: he was a fisherman.

Thus, deep in those dark woods and alone with Christ Alone, he spoke with Him and heavenly heights were revealed to him. Spiritual sights were unveiled for him, and our Lord placed before him all the powers of heaven concealed in the Church. It was thus that he knew at last what he had to have, and what to say to the world.

THE HUMBLE CELL ON SPRUCE ISLAND

Now let us go a little further on, to the time when the saint arrives in Alaska. He chose one of the smallest islands, named for the spruce trees of which it had very many. But the whole side of it where St. Herman chose to settle was barren of any people. And, because his former monastery, where his hermitage had been, was called Valaam—for that reason he called the hut that he constructed, and its adjoining chapel, New Valaam.

Though the area was deserted, people immediately came to him. As you know, wherever a monk goes people follow, and wherever there is a monastery, they come and flood the place. As soon as he went there, people came to settle. They were Aleuts, people who then knew nothing of Christ.

He built a little cell. He built a little church, and made as well a little house for orphan children. He was simple, invisible, silent. He didn't shout. He didn't make a big noise and cry: "Here I am!" Never, especially, did he allow people to accord him any honor. Later, when

they asked and begged to make him a priest or even a bishop, that most holy man saw himself as unworthy and refused. He always wanted to remain an ascetic.

The *Philokalia* says something very beautiful somewhere, something to which Saint Herman conformed: "It profits you to be without the rank of priesthood. It is profitable for you not to govern other men, to be simple, humble, to fast, and be continent. Then you will become eminent and will shine like the stars, and, if they still oblige you to take the priesthood, you should know that you will lose everything you have gained up to that point and will never succeed in anything spiritual again."

Certainly, there are those others whom God has called to accept both priesthood and the office of bishop. For this reason Saint Athanasius the Great says: "Whether you become bishop, whether you become priest, if you fast you will feed the people with God's word. If you stay thirsty, you will quench men's thirst with divine grace. If you are a man of prayer, you will unceasingly be crowning men's heads with the wings of angels and of God's grace."

Therefore our saint chose invisibility and simplicity. He never blessed with his hand, but only with his cross. He never wanted to show himself off as someone important. He accomplished the mysteries of the Spirit in accordance with his own way of asceticism.

It is thus, in the midst of asceticism, in the midst of vigils and prayer and fasting, that the saint was truly established as a missionary. I mean by this that he was taught the heavenly doctrines, was furnished with the weapons of the Holy Spirit, that he acquired the armor of all the saints whom he had taken into his heart. And it was thus that he became an equal of the Apostles, and that by similar means. As the Apostles were filled with God and so gave Him to men, so was Saint Herman filled with God. Truly, his power was Christ Himself.

You might have heard today's Gospel for the saint, the famous phrase that goes: "Go therefore, teach all nations... And lo, I am with you always..." (Matt. 28:19–50). Thus was Christ indeed with Saint Herman. Both summer and winter he wore the same clothes. His shirt

was deerskin. His bed was a board and his blanket itself another board. His pillow was composed of bricks. And what did he have in place of the leather belt that we monks wear? A chain that weighed over seventeen pounds and that hurt his flesh, that chafed him and that he endured. His food was the herbs that he found around his hut. His work was hard. He prayed on his knees and in the midst of ice. His prayer services followed one after the other. And what did he have besides this? He had compassion. His heart loved other hearts. His heart burned inside him and sensed the needs of others.

So, the needs of another person passed through him like an electric current. He understood it immediately and was eager to help. In him love for people was joined to the solitude of his humble cell. You see? His readiness to help others was in exact proportion to his strictness with himself. He did not rush to lay obligations on them. He gave whatever anyone coming to him asked of him. He gave them love like a parent gives a child. He served them in whatever way they asked.

And, in particular, he loved those whom Christ loves: the children, especially the orphans. He read to them from the Scriptures; he taught them. They learned how to read and write from him, how to sing the services. They learned skills from him that they could use later to earn a living. When he discovered another warm and consecrated heart in a wonderful woman named Sophia, he made her a mother for the orphaned children. He became a wise fisherman for those children, with the help of that woman. I mean by fisherman that he guided them, both children and adults, not to some ordinary path but to the one that leads to heaven. And on Sundays he gathered the Aleuts in the church and there joined preaching to his asceticism, preaching of the sort that leads people to the knowledge of God. Thus, there where there had been no Christianity whatever, everything was filled with the rush and evidence of the Holy Spirit. The Aleuts grew mighty in the faith because they saw a living Christian monasticism, a way of life that is true and vibrant. It was Christianity in action, a tradition that neither rises nor falls but is steadfast forever. Thus the monastery, his little hermitage, became the

light of the world. Life's problems did not confuse his people because he, the monk, had shown them the solution.

SAINT HERMAN IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS

Later on, though, the poor man did suffer many difficulties. What were we saying earlier? Oh, we Christians! As the Holy Scriptures say, it is because of us that the name of God is so often dishonored and that men blaspheme Him.

Those merchants who earlier had begun the mission, as we were saying, fell deeply into the passion for gain and so became exploiters. What did they do? They forced the Christian Aleuts into slavery, worked them like dogs, and so barbarous did their life become that they preferred to die rather than be tyrannized by the "Orthodox Christians" who had come from far away. Mothers even killed their own children to keep them from falling into the hands of these "Christian" merchants. Look at what happens! It is always we Christians who create the Church's problems. These men had a monopoly of many things, for example of books, candles, wine, and incense, such that the missionaries had neither incense nor wine with which to celebrate the liturgy, nor books to read for the services. The merchants had all these and exacted a steep price for them.

There even came a day when one of these people entered Saint Herman's cell to see if perhaps he had hidden away some furs or money, either for himself or to help the suffering Aleuts. The merchants knew how much he loved the new Christians, how he defended them, and so they told themselves that he had put away something for them. They did not understand that he was a father to his children. So, this one man finds his little cell—so very little!—and thinks to himself: "Where has he hidden it?" He takes an axe and starts to chop away at the wooden floor in case the saint has hidden some furs underneath. At this Saint Herman says to him: "Don't use your axe, because someone else will hit you on the head with it and you'll die." And sure enough, a little afterwards someone else, even more of an exploiter than the other, hit the man on the head with the axe and he died. Saint Herman, though,

continued to dwell in the abode of peace. The believers around him all found rest in their hearts, and warmth and peace.

HIS LIFE A CONTINUOUS MIRACLE

So, beloved, what did this man not do? Through all these troubles his life remained summery. He fed on, was satiated day and night with God. He knew that his monastic *rason* was his greatest glory, and by virtue of his monastic life he arrived at those heights that we men usually think are superhuman and unattainable. It is thus that he became gifted with discernment, that he saw the future, that his eyes looked inside people's hearts, that they saw through space and into eternity. And even when he grew blind, he still knew who was coming and would prophesy to that person. The miracles he did! I will not tell you all of them. All the saints have their miracles. How he placed the icon of the Mother or God on the sea shore and stopped the dreadful tidal waves that were going to sweep everything away; how he went and by his presence and prayer put a stop to forest fires raging in those endless woods.

For years and years his prayer continued on and grew and grew, and with it so did his purity, his contemplation of God, his heavenly charisms. The very bears were like playthings at his hands. The wild beasts of the forest came to do him homage. Animals and birds provided him with company when he was alone. They represented the invisible angels. He knew miracles from the time that he was a boy of sixteen: in his seventeenth year he grew very ill, could not be cured. So what did he do? He fell down in worship to the Mother of God and said: "I will not get up again unless you make me well," and the Mother of God touched his hand, saying: "Get up! I have cured you." A young boy! From that moment on he began to have complete confidence in God and in His mother.

But do not think, beloved, that this isolation was an easy thing. Whenever any of us are lonely, we try to find someone else to keep us company. And he was a human being. He, too, had his needs. And whenever he would, on occasion, feel his solitude, he would say to himself: "I am not alone. God is here, and so are His angels." Indeed, there

has truly never—but never!—been an instant or place where any of us has been without God, or His angels, or His saints—and, in particular for us now, without Saints Herman and Spiridon. We break up our solitude with other things. We abandon our real life for things that are fake. We put different lies and yearnings in its place, and crowd out our days with misunderstandings and labors that bedazzle us. But he, Saint Herman, filled up his days in the way that is right; he filled them up with God.

One day, beloved—do you know what he saw one day while he was walking along the beach? He lifts up his eyes, and what does he see? He sees angels coming down from heaven. They came down to the sea and celebrated the service of the blessing of water. The angels lifted up the cross, did the blessing, and then afterwards went back to heaven. The saint took from that water that had been blessed and the sick became well, the paralyzed and the crippled were made whole. All of which showed that the appearance of the angels and the blessing had been true.

PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD IS THE DEATH OF HIS SAINTS

But let us go on, beloved, to the saint's old age. The elder and missionary had grown grey in his solitude, and in that companionship which was the gift of his heart to others. Now he is ready for God to take him. The servant of God goes to his heavenly Father. As a saint of ancient times once said that he was himself the wheat ready to enter into and be stored up in the granary, in the silos of heaven, so there, too, did our saint have to enter, he who was living wheat.

The important days of our life are the following: the day of our birth into the world, which reveals that God has called us to heaven; the second is our baptism, which shows that we have the right to go to heaven; and the third great moment of our life is the day of our death, our falling asleep, because it is our death which places us in the life of heaven, in Paradise.

So, too, did there come to him that unique, that special and blessed hour that comes to every man, the hour of his death. Whom did he

not invite to it! He called for Sophia, the mother of the children. He called for his orphan children. He called as well for a certain young man whom God had sent to him there, whose name was Gerasim. And all around him were the bears, the animals, the birds of the sky, and the invisible angels. Then the holy one says to Gerasim, "Light the candles." He lights them. "Read to me from the Apostle, and afterwards I myself will read from the Gospel." The young man begins to read from the Apostle. A little while passes; and a light fills the room. Gerasim loses his place. "Stop!" the saint tells him, "God has told me that He wants me to live another eight days. This is His will." So everyone goes back again to his or her daily life. And, eight days later, he calls them all together again and says: "Light the candles. Read the apostle." And Gerasim, looking one moment at the Gospel book, another moment at the saint, sees the latter's head crowned with light, his face radiant and filled with Light. He loses his place. The children, too, grow still, and they all realize that the saint has departed. On that very same night, on another island where there were also Aleuts, they saw a kind of form, all of light, ascending up the sky, and said, "The saint is going to heaven." On still another island they saw a cloud ascending, and said: "The saint has left us and is going to heaven." In fact he had gone to heaven, but without ever abandoning the earth, his people, or the Church. He left behind his heavy chains, his monastic cap. He left behind as well his cross. Before he died, he said, "I do not want you to honor me at all."

As you know, most of the saints on dying have said to their monks, "Do not bury me. Let the dogs, the wild beasts, devour me." Others say: "Plant me in the earth without ceremony," and others: "Throw me into the sea," and still others: "Throw me over the cliff." Saint Herman said: "Do not bury me. Do not do anything for me. I want to be, always, the least in the universe." Yet his children, his orphan children, waited forty days because they did not know what to do. They did not know what to do, and so waited forty days for a priest to come. Why did they wait? Because there was a storm the meanwhile. And why a storm? So that the saint's wish should come true. Because no priest came, the orphans

finally buried him in a shallow grave. And, after another forty days, the priest finally came.

So, beloved, he departed. Yet, he did not depart. He is with us in the Lord and his relic is here. Let us remember what Saint Basil the Great says about relics: "You," he says, "who have touched the bones of a martyr, when you take hold of the relics of the saints, when you kiss them, you partake of the saint's holiness, you receive the Holy Spirit Who tabernacles in his remains."

A CALL TO VENERATION AND IMITATION OF THE SAINT

Now, let us venerate his relic, beloved. As soon as his troparion is sung, they will bring it out and we will venerate it. It is the largest relic of Saint Herman to exist outside of the church where his bones are kept.[1]

I want to conclude with something that happened after his death in order to finish by saying how we, as the epistle we are going to read from later on says, may become monks just as he was, monks in our own different ways, each in his or her particular place, in the midst of our daily lives.

A ship went out to sea from the colony in Alaska and passed by exactly the harbor of Saint Herman's island. The sea was amazingly calm, amazing because it is almost always rough there and the winds always contrary. So, when the captain saw the sea so calm, he said to himself: "A once in a lifetime chance to make good time!" Everyone on board begged him to stop so they could go and venerate the grave of the holy man. It had already become the custom that, when the ships went out to sea, they stopped and reverenced the saint's resting place—and those who did not found themselves, more often than not, caught by foul weather, sometimes for as long as a month! In spite of these pleas, the captain decided to go full speed ahead and out to sea.

But what happened? They made good time at first and went far, far out to sea, only to confront a strong contrary wind and be blown right back to the island. There, in the middle of the harbor and with everyone escaping safely, the ship was dashed on the rocks and sank.

The only thing left above the water was the tip of the mast, forming a cross. So we are reminded that it is impossible to ignore this saint and fail to venerate him. A cross is indeed our lot if we fail to accept the grace and the Spirit of God that the saint bears in himself—as all saints bear it in themselves.

We, too, have our periods of calm and our times of storm. Whenever we have calm, beauty, peace, and joy in our lives, let us not forget God. Because we usually forget in such circumstances. God would not give us troubles if our good times urged us to ascend to Him more quickly.

So, whenever we do have peace and happiness, then let our prayer increase, and our fasting and vigil, and everything whereby we may draw closer to God.

When, however, we have difficulties, it should be nothing to us. Listen to the Apostle Paul whom we shall read from later: "As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities... labors, vigils... in purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, in the Holy Spirit... and the power of God" (2 Cor. 6:4–7). He says that in our life we should not serve vanity, nor our bodies, nor the world, nor money, nor anything other than God who is our Father and Lord. How does he say that we should commend ourselves and prove that we are God's children? He says, "Through endurance." Troubles and illnesses will never be lacking. Endurance is the seal on our love for God "in afflictions, in hardships." When life's circumstances pursue us, when misfortunes, problems, inequalities beat down on us and break on us, then let us not be afraid. Let us be full of confidence in God "in afflictions, in hardships and calamities." "In labors": let us indeed weary ourselves, but in fasting, in prayer, through our love for our husband or wife. Let us take up the burdens of our children, especially when we are not especially happy with them. "In vigils": let us pray and keep watch. Let us be neighbors for others. Vigils are an imitation of the angels. It is the angels who are the greatest keepers of vigils. "In purity": a pure life. "In knowledge": let us possess that knowledge that is real. Let us seek out the knowledge of God, of the Church, of Paradise. "In forbearance": when others make troubles for us, let us be

long-suffering. "In kindness": when those who oppose us are cruel, let us on the other hand be kind. "In the Holy Spirit and the power of God": let us prove that we carry the seal of Christ. What do these mean, "in the Holy Spirit and the power of God"? The Spirit Himself will teach us their meaning.

Let us touch this relic with our hands and lips, and in our minds let us salute all of our saints, because they—as we have said—are full of the Holy Spirit. They are like a washcloth or sponge. You squeeze, and water runs out. Just so does the Holy Spirit pour out of the saints and fill us up inside. "In the power of God": the Holy Spirit is the power of God that brings all things to perfection.

We have the saints. Let us love them. I mean, by loving them let us think of them and study them, and the Holy Spirit and the power of God will be all our company and our strength.

I pray that God may so grace all of you though the prayers of the All-Holy Mother of God, and of Saints Herman and Spiridon. Amen.

14

Second Sermon in Honor of Saint Herman of Alaska

BELOVED!* We celebrate the memory of a saint who has something special to give to us. This is a saint for whom we have longed for thirty years, and whom we have now succeeded in bringing here to have him near us. He is a saint whose astonishing simplicity—yet greatness—we discover on reading his life. Saint Herman lived in great poverty and humility. He lived as God Himself wills us to live. Indeed, precisely for this reason he has left his indelible traces, his life-bearing spirit, his exemplary missionary path and activity as worthy of imitation. He accomplished all this in that most distant place, Alaska, a land we know of as one of eternal ice, of polar days and nights. He accomplished it among the poor, for the Aleut nation, those people who recognized and continued to preserve the faith they received from him to the present day. Before his precious relics these same people make their profoundly heartfelt and reverent prostration with a longing, gratitude, and honor that we ourselves would do well to envy. Thus they offer up to God the worship that is His due.

To the present day these Aleuts feel that they have seen the saint with their own eyes. They venerate him in a way that we might well call mythical—and, let us admit it, such heroes of the Church are all too often mythical for us, and we shall see why.

In any case, God is worshipped there, and we know that wherever God is worshipped there is enjoyment of the knowledge of Him. There, in such worship, one may rejoice and be satisfied, and receive the knowledge of God and the fruits of God. Who is unaware that a saint is like

*Given December 16, 1987 at the metochion church of Saint Haralambos, Thessalonica.

a kind of dishcloth in that he soaks up and then flows with streams of divine grace? He gathers the fruits of the Spirit and brings them all together in himself. He becomes like a treasure chest—nor is it just a matter of becoming "like" a treasure. A saint, as Saint John Chrysostom would say, is like a gold mine: the more you prospect, dig into, and learn of the saint's life and manner of living, the more precious ore you collect.

And where, you ask, did we find this saint and so decide to bring him here from those frozen lands? Don't we have saints in Greece? Of course we do! But, if a mother has very many children, would she not want to have all of them with her on her feast-day? Mother Church is no different. She forgets none of her children, wherever they may have fallen asleep. What do I mean? Saint Herman, beloved, is not just an Alaskan saint, but a native of Mount Athos. He is a fruit of the Holy Mountain. His fathers were Athonites. Saint Herman, I repeat, is a most sweet and wonder-working fruit of the Holy Mountain of Athos.

THE APOSTOLATE OF MOUNT ATHOS

It is a well known fact that very many Athonites have gone out, or rather were sent by God, to become missionaries, founders of monasteries, spiritual guides and instructors, and pillars of spiritual and ecclesiastical life throughout the inhabited earth. We know of occasions where some have left their monasteries on Athos as missionaries and, arriving at their destination with an icon of the Theotokos, have handed on the prayers of their elder, the abbot of the monastery that had sent them, and the blessing of our Lady of the Holy Mountain.

Again, we know of an occasion when the *Protos* of the Holy Mountain, together with abbots of all the monasteries, left Athos in order to go to a diocese in a foreign country and bring life and spiritual contact to the believers living there. The Holy Mountain from its origins has been the special country of the Ecumenical Church. It is a land of "catholic" radiance, a transmitter of innumerable theologians, spiritual leaders, ascetics, a place of life-giving influence and blessing.

Our Saint Herman was born of such efforts. He lived in a Russian monastery from the age of sixteen, and was there some twenty-two years

as a monk. The monastery was the one called "Valaam," to which two Athonite saints, Sergius and Herman, had been sent and which they built up and nursed as a brotherhood, and indeed they made it a place of miracles. Icons, books, and manuscripts on Athos and even in our own monastery prove the transference from the Holy Mountain to Russia by means of these two holy men. They were men who carried with and in themselves the whole Athonite spirit, the life of the Mountain and the spirituality of the *Philokalia.*

Thus it was there, in that monastery and especially in its deep forests, that Saint Herman studied the patristic tradition of the Holy Mountain which, in turn and in continuity, he took with him to shine in Alaska. See how rightly divine Providence gave the name of "Athos" to the Holy Mountain! "Athos" means something which "shines," "burns," "radiates." The message of the Athonite Fathers has reached the ends of earth and heaven. They took up their staffs and went out to unknown lands solely on account of the commandment they had received, and in order to benefit the inhabited world with humility, to communicate the word of the Holy Fathers of the Church, the distillate of the wisdom of the Spirit. Thus they became Apostles of Christ and were enrolled in the choir of the Apostles. Each of their lives is one that has the meaningful and apostolic element of the virtues, of spiritual gifts, and of those life-experiences that guide the saints who know how to implant God in men's souls.

ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO BE APOSTLES

All of us who live in Christ know that we have the same obligation. We, who are disciples of the Apostles, should likewise have the same apostolic charisms, because God also attends to us personally, has called us each to Himself and to the Church as Mother. Can we not imitate the Apostles of every age? There is no believer who can say: "I am not an apostle." Every apostle is an imitator of those who came before him, and the latter again of the ones before them, and so on down to the great Fathers of the earliest centuries, to the Apostles themselves and

to that very period when they lived who heard and saw the Lord—even as they see Him now and rejoice in Him. We would say that those who were eyewitnesses had themselves heard, touched, and experienced the whole of God. But this is also our own desire and our own apostolate. Christ handed on to His Apostles what He had Himself received from the Father. He is consequently Himself the first Apostle. He communicated what He had received to the Apostles, and the latter passed it on to apostolic men, and they in turn to all the apostles of the Church. Beloved, we are therefore all one in the Lord, and He has called everyone of us by name.

WHAT MAKES AN APOSTLE?

Let us take a closer look at the Apostles of the first years in order to see their characteristics as apostles and thus learn of our own calling. Remember what the Lord said before His Ascension, that all who believed in the Apostles would have the same characteristics as they, that "These signs will accompany those who believe" (Mark 16:17). From the very hour that the disciples should begin their apostolic work the signs would nowhere cease, but would be like waves in the sea, a succession without end.

A Personal Call. What then are the signs of the Apostles and of our own life as Christians? I have already noted them, but let us look at the Gospel reading for today. It says that the names of the Apostles were the following: "First Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother..." (Matt. 10:2ff). We do not find that Christ said anonymously, "I have called you all to be My Apostles." No! He speaks to them individually, person by person. He pronounces each of their names, even expresses the particular characteristic of each. So He says: "First Simon, whom I have named Peter. Andrew is his brother," as if to say that there should be no confusion since other apostles would come who would have the same names. And, inasmuch as He called them personally, so are they personally accountable to Him. The same applies to us. Here in Greece people even give names to their cows and goats. Even the animals are

not anonymous! So how could God ever see humanity as an undifferentiated mass? He could not! He calls and speaks to each one as His apostle. When He spoke to the Persecutor saying: "Saul, Saul!" (Acts 9:4) He was calling him to this office. When suddenly, after His Resurrection, He spoke that wonderful word, "Mary," which pierced the bowels of the blessed Magdalene, and she answered Him with: "Rabbouni" (John 20:16), such a dialogue is also our very own apostolic relationship with God.

To Learn from Christ. If God has addressed us each by name, then what are the characteristics we ought to have? The Gospel tells us: "Learn from Me, for I am meek" (Matt. 11:29). This is the first characteristic of the Apostle. "Learn from Me!" What does "Learn" mean? We said that they learn the very things that the Father gives to the Son, and that what He in turn has given us has become the possession of the Church forever: "No one knows the Father except the Son and that one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him," and "No one knows the Son" unless the Father inclines to him (Matt. 11:27). It is a single teaching, a single blessing of Christ over the Apostles.

To Teach Christ in the Living Chain of the Tradition. What then does "teaching" mean? We said it means a handing over[2] from one hand to another right on down to us. It means a communication of knowledge and experience that becomes the knowledge and experience of the whole Church. It is a unique submission to Christ. It is like the submission that a woman, a mother, makes when she is pregnant and is obliged to submit to the laws of pregnancy, that is, to endure nine whole months before she is able to bring forth her child. This is just exactly the same for us, too. This "teaching" is a kind of pregnancy because it is knowledge and experience in fact, a conceiving of Christ within our own hearts.*

*The notion of each Christian as himself or herself the "mother" of Christ, although perhaps strange to the modern ear, has ample precedent in the patristic literature. The reader should look especially to writings of Saint Symeon the New

Nor is it merely a conception, but is as well an unfolding, a marriage, a union. It is Christ's embodiment in us, the very deification of us who incline to Him. It is therefore our participation in His life, so far as we are able to attain to it. Our life is thus an apostolic mystery, a sacrament. The same, single activity at work in us is that which engaged the Apostles. And our life unfolds in the sacraments, in our gathering for worship, in the communion of the saints of whom we are aware day and night, whom we hear and perceive, and to whom we speak. Some of the saints live in heaven and others are still upon the earth. There is no generation without its saints. The one generation communicates its charisms to the other, creates a chain. The first depart and are followed by those who come after, and the former speak from heaven while awaiting us who are left in this life.

Saint Herman an Exemplar. Saint Herman, because he loved Christ and was struck in particular by and honored the Apostle Paul, decided to become a disciple. He decided to become a disciple of Paul. But where could he find Paul? Clearly, in his writings. But this was not his way. He preferred the simple logic of the man of the Church. What did he do in fact? He decided to learn, so he went to the monastery. He submitted himself not to an invisible, but to a visible abbot—the latter being himself a saint—in the monastery of Valaam. He submitted to the brotherhood. In so doing, he submitted to the founders of the monastery and, through them, to the Holy Mountain, to the Church, to the Tradition. He submitted thus to the Apostles, and so to Christ. And, when he arrived in Alaska for the mission, he did no extraordinary things, nor in life did he engage in an active apostolate in search of earthly glory. Instead, he decided to remain a monk. His monastic influence was his mission, and this is very characteristic of the Athonites. He built a little hut. He fasted most of the time and, when he did put something into his mouth, it was always some kind of vegetable. He slept on boards and pulled a board over himself as a blanket. His clothes were of skins, just

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Theologian, in particular *Ethical Discourses*, 1,10 (available in English through Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press).

like those of the Church's ascetic saints. And every so often he would write to his monastery in order to stay in touch with it.

So you see how he understood the "teaching," and in consequence his role in teaching others. What is therefore first is this: acceptance of the treasures of heaven, of its mysteries, of all these things we desire and shall see, but which we do not have right before us and so do not comprehend.

Non-Possession. Another characteristic I want to emphasize also comes from today's Gospel: "Possess no gold," He says, "nor silver, nor copper in your belts, nor bag for your journey" (Matt. 10:9). What does this mean? The apostle must be completely without possessions, practice a voluntary poverty, a humble abandonment. And this abandonment, this humility, becomes mother of all the charisms of the Spirit and of all the revelations that we seek when we choose to learn by means of the Apostles. Complete poverty and non-possession is consequently a prerequisite for discipleship. But is it easy for anyone in the world to be completely without possessions? So, what did Herman do after he embraced monasticism? He chose to live in that wretched little hut, "possessing nothing and cleaving alone to the things of God," just as all the saints have done—some in huts, some on the highways, some in forests, in mountains, in deserts, others in caves, still others in trees, in tombs, and on the tops of pillars. This is the absolute non-possession of the Apostles. When the Lord then said, "Behold, I sent you out" (Matt. 10:16), He understood what a difficult task He was giving them and for that reason He called them each by name, so that each should pay attention and understand that this was his apostolate. Nor does it stop there. It is at least possible for me to be poor if I can have my peace and quiet. The Lord, however, continues and says: you will be "as sheep in the midst of wolves," and they will betray you, will hound you, lord it over you, exploit you, continually oppress you. And this will never stop at all. So then, we have the self-denial of the Apostles which appears both in their complete poverty and in their being tossed about, we might say, on the waves of life.

The Wealth of the Spirit. But how could anyone endure this dreadfully difficult vocation of non-possession while at the same time constantly confronting the sparks others are throwing at him in order to catch him on fire? Because the Lord puts another flame within him! He says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). It is therefore the Holy Spirit Who will ultimately accomplish what is from above, and Who will encircle us to bring us to the beginning of knowledge of the heavenly Father. All these, the poor and—as we might say—the disinherited have as their inheritance the Kingdom of Heaven. These were all who were rich in the Holy Spirit, who truly possessed in themselves the wealth of heaven and the fellowship of the Spirit. This fellowship truly exists, and it exists in the Church and is given to fervent and apostolic hearts. The Spirit is in communion with our own Spirit. With the Holy Spirit in our spirit, the latter becomes in its turn like that washcloth we spoke of above. It soaks up the power, divinity, and activities of the Spirit. Thus our spirit becomes itself radiance, becomes a fount of power and the revelation of mysteries which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" (1 Cor. 2:9). We become initiates of the mystery. The riches of the Spirit and the riches of heaven, these are what the Lord conveys to us, what He encloses within our own spirit, and so we now become ourselves like heaven, like the Kingdom of God. It is the Holy Spirit Who tabernacles in us. The Comforter is our light, our power. He is our awareness of God, which is to say, he is the discovery and affirmation of God in our persons, and the assurance and certainty of our persons in God. Because God is One, it is impossible for there to be one God within us and one God in heaven. We therefore find ourselves, even in this life, in God. The Holy Spirit, Who is thus known by experience in asceticism, in monastic retreat, in prayer and vigil, communicates all the charisms necessary for us to give life both to ourselves and to others. He gives us all those charisms of the Apostles that make us apostles and equal in dignity to the angels. Such is the experience of the Spirit's charisms that we may, as it were, even play with God's gifts in our hands, in our will—since the latter has been united to God's own will. We shall finger them in our hands like we handle our *komboskhini*.

What is a prayer rope if not a symbol of God, an icon of Him? What is the Holy Spirit? He is God Himself, in Person, Who cultivates in us our salvation.

So the life of Saint Herman began with miracles and with the charisms of the Holy Spirit. I will not talk about them here, that is not the purpose of today's homily. My desire was rather that we venerate the saint, accept the Holy Spirit, and see His charisms in our saints. Saint Herman lived with wonderful feats of asceticism. He became himself a sanctuary of divinity tabernacling among angels and saints. And he completed his life with all the proofs of the genuine holiness of the Spirit Whom he had attained. And his life stretches out as on a cross to all the saints in the heavens. He set himself to become a member of a missionary team. This first team sent to Alaska was composed entirely of monks. Without altering his way of life, but instead accepting its greater difficulty and honoring his monastic vows, he brought it all to his little hut, to his new monastery.

THE LIVING WISDOM OF THE APOSTOLIC PROCLAMATION

Personal charisms are not given as a reward, we know this. God does not give charisms to any of us because we ask for them, nor because we think we need them. No! Charisms are designated for the edification of Christ's body, as the Apostle Paul shows (cf. 1 Cor. 12–14). The personal gifts of the saint, of any saint, are given for the sake of God's people. And, consequently, as we have said, they comprise the essential patrimony of the saint's spiritual children and, by extension, of all the faithful. They receive the charisms freely, they give them freely, in combination with the apostolic preaching. Have not the saints turned many away from idols with charisms and preaching? Have they not redeemed many from their demonic customs? Have they not taken many up to heaven with these same charisms? That which is said in the *Wisdom of Solomon* holds true for all these monks: "The mouths of the wise distill wisdom." Christ is Wisdom and Wisdom is the Holy Spirit. Because the monk has These within himself, it is only natural that, as soon as

he opens his mouth to preach, wisdom comes forth; Christ comes forth; the Holy Spirit comes forth. The Apostles' preaching was simple. What did they say, after all? One "Repent" followed by a "The Kingdom of God is at hand." This was the Apostles' preaching. What were the rest of the words? They were not words. They were that Wisdom which the *Wisdom of Solomon* mentions.

The proclamation is not a set of concepts, is not the contents of worldly human experience. These are human things that everyone knows. Rather, the proclamation is the experience and life of heaven; it is the revelation that accompanies that emigration to the life in heaven which the saints accomplish while they are still in this life. "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand" means that, indeed, it *has* come. It has come within me, within the apostle, within the saint. Thus only when I in fact possess Christ, possess the life and perception, the plenitude of the Kingdom, the fiery working of Heaven inside my heart, only then can I say: "Repent, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" This is because "repent" means a complete change of heart, that is, a change in that spiritual faculty in the soul that comprehends heavenly things.

Without such lived experiences, without such charisms, generation after generation would not have been able to fill the world with the Orthodox faith. What can I say about what I have not seen? What shall I say if I do not have Heaven and the Kingdom within me? It is only thus that I know that Paradise exists and that I am able to tell others about it and how they may possess it. The work of a missionary is not therefore merely a struggle, a simple effort. It is a communication of Christ which must confront the dreadful egoism of men's hearts. The missionaries, we might say, are obliged to confront heaven and earth, because man always rejects what is for his own good. These charisms make the way easier, smooth out the way of the apostolate.

TWO EXAMPLES OF APOSTOLIC CHARISMS: SAINTS KOPRYS AND JUVENALY

You heard the name of the saint we read about today in the *Synaxarion*. He was called Koprys, a saint of the Church. He was a great ascetic

who, on passing through Constantinople, saw a heretic, a Manichaean, who was, as the story goes, leading the flock astray, preaching in the great square and tearing the faithful away from the faith, leading them toward the shipwreck of heresy. He was destroying the work of Christ, and this was when Koprys happened by. The saint sees all this and tries to persuade the man. He will not be persuaded. What does the saint say then? "Let us devise a test for the Spirit. Light a fire," he says to the crowd, "a big fire, and both of us will go inside it. And whoever is burned is in error, and whoever does not get burned has the truth." The crowd agrees delightedly with this way of solving the problem... Could we, beloved, do something like this ourselves? Our faith is atrophied, anemic. But this saint made bold to test the Holy Spirit. What did the Spirit answer?

When the manichaean heard this, he said: "It was your idea, so you go first." And Saint Koprys replies, "Gladly!" and enters the fire. Immediately, the flames part and the saint stands inside the fire, comfortably cool, for nearly half an hour. Does this impress you? Have you forgotten the three children? Have you forgotten how many such miracles have happened? There are not just one or two of these, or a hundred, or a thousand, or a million. Such things have happened innumerable times.

Shall I tell another such story? The man who is called the protomartyr of America, who had come to Alaska with our Saint Herman and was named Juvenaly, caught up with a group of idolators to teach them about Christianity. And what did they do? They assaulted and killed him. They killed the saint! But, after his murderers had left his body behind, the power of the Holy Spirit raised him up. And, once again, his assailants see him behind them. But how, you ask, can this be? Many have been thus raised up, many indeed! Both before Christ's crucifixion and after. Do you believe that Saint Juvenaly was raised? Of course he was! We have no doubt of it, and we can give good arguments for it. So then, he did rise. They see him and begin to fire arrows at him in order to kill him again. They shoot at him, and once more he falls. He gets up yet again. They shoot at him a second, third, fourth time—many

times—until they wonder at his endurance. Finally they do succeed in murdering him and he becomes, as we said, America's first martyr.

THE APOSTOLATE AND ITS CHARISMS ARE FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN

If we do not have the power of the charisms, how shall we do missionary work? No, we must not think that the charisms are exclusively resurrections from the dead, or not being touched by fire, or other such things. The life in Christ is full of charisms. The whole world is full of many kinds of charisms. We have holy men here who can fast for ten, twenty, thirty, and forty days. We have others who keep vigil, who fight sleep for days on end until God replies to them. The work of a missionary is, as I said, a hardship. Only when you have authority can you trample down the serpents in men's hearts and pull out the doves that are also there. The monks' asceticism brings them these charisms, together with humility, mortification, and freedom from the passions.

And this freedom from passions is itself a charism, dispassion, innocence, purity, and all the virtues. When someone then attains to [all] these, there still remains one: the apostolic charism. What is that? It is perfect self-denial and the taking up of the Cross. I mean death.

The greatest testimony of love and the greatest glory of God is the death of a righteous man, of a saint. God thus grants a martyr's death to these great, charismatic men. That which He said about Himself Christ also communicated to the Apostles, and the Apostles to us. What did He say? "I have food to eat you know not of." He means: "I have to undergo death. For this purpose have I come, and this is My pride, My boast." Thus He also said to the sons of Zebedee: "I have a cup to drink and a Baptism to endure" (cf. Mark 10:38–39), by which He means death. A witness was laid down by Christ, and there is a witness for us to make as well. This apostolic witness or martyrdom is for us the witness of our daily lives, what we are called to do to become spotless and apostolic before Christ.

Can all these things, beloved, be accomplished in our world? Of course they can! The apostles were not all monks. The sole difference

between the world and the monastery is that in the world this is difficult and rare, while in the monastery it is frequent and easy. In the monastery there is an abundance of everything, an abundance of charisms, of men, of angels, of saints, an abundance of movement from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven.

The monastic estate is like a bus climbing the road to the heights. And for this reason Saint Herman went to the monastery of Valaam and simplified his heart in every way: so that he might partake of holiness. This is why he went into the forests and lived a life of abandonment. This is how he became a herald of the Kingdom to come. He was refreshed and made glad by his hermitage because it was filled with the heavens. He received everyone. The approach to missionary work that he followed was precisely the one followed by Mount Athos to the present day. It was completely Athonite. He did not wander around. Whoever came to his cell he received as Christ, loved him, and taught him of the Church. Thus his life remained at once monastic and fully worthy of the apostolic dignity.

These ways remain ever the same today. And God remembered him and gave him a successor,* a wonderful apostle, who organized the Church of Alaska in continuity with his predecessor. Thus one sowed, another watered, another harvested, and another prepared the vintage (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6ff). Who is it who really gathers, who prepares the harvest? God Himself. And whom does He wish to gather, to harvest? Obviously, He wills to harvest us, His apostles, and gather us into the vaults on high, in heaven.

EXHORTATION AND CONCLUDING PRAYER

We have finished, beloved. You have seen how apostolic and monastic are the attributes of this saint, a single monk who reached out and united the very ends of the inhabited earth. Our hearts can comprehend little of this. Let us say to ourselves "we shall stand in the house of God and gaze upon Him." Wherever we may be, in whatever house,

*Father Aemilianos is referring to the great missionary priest, and later Metropolitan of Moscow, Saint Innocent (Veniaminov).

let us not forget that we are apostles, that we have seen Christ and live in his Kingdom wherever we may thus find ourselves. Let us repeat to ourselves the apostolic words; "Let us stand in the house of God and look upon Him," upon Christ, upon the Invisible become visible.

Beloved, venerate the saint's relics! God's grace is not far from them. Christ's body was laid in the tomb, yet did it ever cease to be holy, did it ever lose its communion with the Holy Spirit? No! As the body of Christ, so is the body of the one who witnessed to Him. The body of Christ's witness is His body, and neither is it ever separated from His grace.

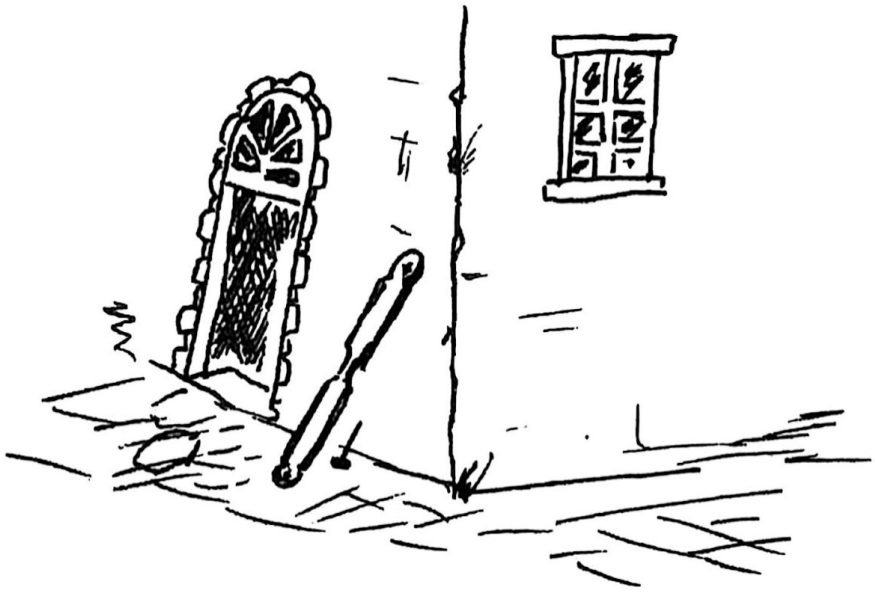
Our lips have touched these relics and we have been sanctified, beloved. For this reason you came today. You have been sanctified; you have been illumined; you have been honored; you have been glorified, both you and we. You have seen how alive, how active is the life of the saint. But his is a monastic activity, a hesychastic one, an activity in common with Christ and the saints of the Church. Let us pray that God give us as well such a spiritual efficacity.

May we be given eyes like the Cherubim so that we may enjoy, as he enjoys, that light which "lightens every man that comes into the world" John 1:9).

By the prayers of Saint Herman let us also, my beloved, attain to that rejoicing in the Holy Spirit of which the Fathers speak. What does "rejoicing" mean? It means that we should attain to that rest, that purity, that detachment, sanctity, uprightness, such that we become upright, that our life may become the food of Paradise and that, in consequence, by feeding on it we may long for what is yet beyond and higher still, the highest good. That is, I mean to say that the hour should come when, perceiving our hearts to be truly apostolic—and the apostle exists in order to die—we may turn and fill the Church with other apostles. May we, when we become participants of the charisms of the Spirit, be enabled ourselves to die in this fashion. But first, let us be filled, since no one would wish to die unless he were first satisfied.

Let us be filled with the food that today's Paradise has given us, and let us finally arrive at that moment when we can say with the righteous Symeon:

> Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.
> For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation
> Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples,
> A light to lighten the gentiles,
> And the glory of Thy people Israel (Luke 2:29–32).



Notes

In citing works in the notes, short titles have generally been used after the initial reference. Further information may often be found in the annotated bibliography that follows the notes. Abbreviations are as follows: *PG*: Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (originally ed. Paris; reprinted: Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols); *SC*: *Sources Chrétiennes* (cf. n. 11, p. 216); *ANF*: *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *NPNF*: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (both: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

INTRODUCTION: ATHOS, PAST AND PRESENT

The Holy Mountain

Pages 1–3

1. See ch. 11 below, "The Experience of the Transfiguration in the Life of the Athonite Monk," esp. the section, "Athos and Tabor,"page 207–page 211.

2. Gal. 6:16.

3. Deut. 34:1ff.

4. 1 Kings 18:20ff.

5. Heb. 12:18 and 22.

6. *Life of Antony*, 49; *PG* 26, 913B–916A.

7. Medieval Russia of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is a striking example. Beginning particularly with St. Sergius of Radonezh, d. 1392—see his life by Pierre Kovalevsky, *Saint Sergius and Russian Spirituality*, trans. W. Elias Jones (Crestwood, N.Y., 1975), especially 135ff.—whole regions previously unpopulated were eventually filled with monasteries, towns and cities: hermits followed by monks who in turn were followed by peasants and townsmen until the empty spaces from Moscow to the Urals and White Sea were, if not crowded, then at least punctuated by settlements. For the background and lives of these

northern "desert" dwellers, see the relevant chapters in George P. Fedotov's *Russian Religious Mind* (Belmont, Mass., 1966) 2, especially 195–264, and *The Northern Thebaid: Monastic Saints of the Russian North*, ed. I. M. Kontzevich (trans. and published: Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1975).

8. See our remarks below on SS Nicodemus and Paissy, as well as those on the monk as "Prophet" in the third part of this introduction.

9. Its proper title, see part two of this introduction below.

10. See "The Light of the Holy Mountain" in Part 3 below, 131–page 140.

11. We recall the rabbi's "Prayer for the Tsar" in the musical comedy, *Fiddler on the Roof*: "God save the Tsar and keep him... far away from us!" A certain caution regarding bishops and high church officials runs deep in the monastic tradition. St. John Cassian's warning comes to mind, "flee women and bishops" ("*Institutes*" 11:18, in *NPNF*, 2nd ser., 11:279). The warning against women, it should be noted, comes from the desire to avoid sexual temptation, not from any sense of misogyny, and in the case of bishops the fear is of the danger of temptation to ordination.

12. See Fr. Aemilianos in ch. 9 below, "Martyrdom: Foundation of Orthodox Monasticism," 179–176.

13. One striking twentieth century issue is the "crisis" over the Church calendar, that is, the shift from the Julian to the Gregorian reckoning which was sanctioned by the Greek and certain other local Orthodox churches in the 1920s. Many Athonites rebelled and remain in rebellion—the so-called "Zealots"—and a schism persists in the Greek Church to the present day. Most monks, however, while remaining on the "Old" calendar themselves within Athos's boundaries, at least tolerate the changeover. The latter thus appears to have "taken." One can easily foresee similar crises on the horizon, for example regarding the Ecumenical Movement (alluded to by both Fr. Placide, ch. 1 below, and Fr. Macarius, ch. 6 below), and in particular the approaching reconciliation with the Non-Chalcedonian or Oriental Orthodox churches—Copts, Jacobite Syrians, Ethiopians, Armenians, etc.

A CAPSULE HISTORY OF ATHOS

Pages 3–22

1. The best complete history of Athos in English is Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta's *Mount Athos: the Garden of the Monks*, and shorter accounts are available in the books by Sherrard, Byron, Norwich and Sitwell, Dawkins, etc. (all listed in our annotated Bibliography below). The best single collection of historical documents, although lacking critical acumen, is that of Gerasimos Smirnakis, *To Hagion Oros*, (Thessalonica, 1903; reprinted at Karyes, Athos, 1988). The most complete bibliography (up to 1963) is the one provided in *Le Millénaire de Mont Athos* (also cited in our bibliography).

2. See our Part 2 below, "The Garden of the Mother of God."

3. See Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 55–91 for this and what follows. The term, "lavra," in its monastic sense appears to have come from Palestine in the fifth century and "connotes a row or cluster of solitary cells round a common center, including a church and a bakehouse, where the ascetics would assemble for Saturdays and Sundays, spending the rest of the week in their cells"—from Derwas Chitty's *Desert a City* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1966), 15. The present day "scetes" of Mt. Athos are essentially identical with this mode of monastic life—see the second part of our introduction.

4. For this and the following, see Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 62–105.

5. Ibid., 87.

6. See, for example, R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (1970; vol. 2 of *The Pelican History of the Church*), especially 113–125, for the very similar fever for litigation displayed by, *inter alia*, Western monks at the medieval papal court.

7. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 78–77. See also the articles by Agostino Pertini, "Monasteri e monaci italiani all'Athos nell'alto Medioevo," in *Le Millénaire de Mont Athos*, 217–252, and by Dom Leo Bonsard, "The Benedictine Monastery of St. Mary" (cited in bibliography).

8. The old centers, such as Mt. Olympus in Bithynia—see Bernard Menthon, *L'Olympe de Bithine* (Paris, 1953)—in Asia Minor were by the twelfth century increasingly threatened by Turks and other marauders as the old empire broke down.

9. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 86–87.

10. Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos* (see bibliography), 597. See also the article by Ioannes Anastasiou, *"Ho thryloumenos Diogmos ton Hagioreiton hypo Michael H' Palaiologou kai tou Ioannou Bekkou"* in *Athonike Politeia*, ed. P. Christou (Thessalonica, 1963), 211–257, and especially his conclusions, 252–257, regarding the extreme unlikelihood of any organized persecution of the monks by the imperial and ecclesiastical authorities.

11. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 88–90; cf. also Dawkins, ibid., 86, and Phillip Sherrard, *Athos: the Holy Mountain* (see bibliog.), 26–28.

12. *Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Constable and Kazhdan (Oxford, 1991), 2:923.

13. This prayer has several forms with the long form, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner," being the one usually quoted. Much of Orthodox spiritual literature focuses on this prayer and on how to introduce it into the innermost recesses of the heart. For original texts, cf. Kadloubovsky and Palmer, trans., *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951). For studies, see the brief analyses offered in the pamphlet by Fr. Kallistos Ware, "The Power of the Name," Fairacres Publications 43, 1974, and by Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel, Cistercian Studies, no. 79, (Kalamazoo, 1986), 315–320. See also the monograph by Irénée Flausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, trans. Charles Cummings, Cistercian Studies, no. 44, (Kalamazoo, 1978), and, in this volume, the talk by Fr. Aemilianos in ch. 10 below, "Mount Athos: Sacred Vessel of the Jesus Prayer."

14. For the grounding of hesychast theology and spirituality in Orthodox tradition, see the general work by Fr. John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1974), and in more detail, the same author's *Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George

Lawrence (London, 1964), esp. 134–236. On the "glory" of God, cf. the article *Doxa* by Gerhard Kittel in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1984), 2:232–255. For the word's background in the Old and New Testaments, and for its patristic and monastic usage, "'Gloire de Dieu,' dans l'écriture et chez les Pères de l'église jusqu'à Saint Bernard" by Fr. Placide (Deseille) in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 6, col. 422–463. On the theme of the Transfiguration, so crucial to the hesychast movement, see the study by Fr. Georges Habra, *La Transfiguration chez les Pères Grecs* (Paris, 1973), as well as Fr. Aemilianos's talk on the same theme in Part 4 below.

15. See our Part 2, ch. 5.

16. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, Pref., Book 5. Quoted from the translation in *ANF* 1:526.

17. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 54, *PG* 25 192B. The translation quoted is that of Archibald Robertson in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. E. R. Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 107.

18. D. M. Nicol, Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium (Cambridge, 1979), 88.

19. J. Meyendorff, "Mt. Athos in the Fourteenth Century: Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy" (cf. bibliog.), 107.

20. For the key role played by hesychast patriarchs of Constantinople in the creation of a Russia centered around Moscow and self-consciously a defender of the Orthodox Church, see especially the recent study by Fr. John Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

21. Quoted by Robert Byron, *The Station, Athos: Treasures and Men* (cf. bibliog.), 152.

22. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 106ff.

23. See Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 186–225; and, for a shorter summary, Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 1983 ed. (Penguin Books), 96–111, for accounts of the debilitating effects of Ottoman rule on the Orthodox community.

24. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos,* 206ff.

25. For Maximus the Greek, see the study by Jack V. Haney, *From Italy to Muscovy: The Life and Works of Maxim the Greek,* Reihe 1: Abhandlungen, band 19, *Humanistische Bibliothek* (Munich, 1973)—though, it might be noted, Mr. Haney is not particularly interested in, or sensitive to, those qualities in St. Maximus which led the Russian Church to canonize him.

26. St. Cosmas's life is available in English thanks to the series put out by Constantine Cavarnos, *Modern Orthodox Saints* 1, *St. Cosmos Aitolos* (Belmont, Mass., 1971).

27. See the recent publication by St. Nectarios Press, *The New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke,* translation of the martyrology compiled by St. Nicodemus, trans. Leonidas J. Papadopulos and Georgia Lizardos (Seattle, 1985).

28. For this and much of what follows, I am indebted to Dr. George Bebis's Introduction to *Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel* (cf. bibliog.), 5–65 (hereafter cited as Bebis, "Introduction").

29. Notably St. Symeon the New Theologian, abbot of St. Mamas in Constantinople (d. 1022). See Bebis, ibid., 37ff, for the debate over the degree to which St. Nicodemus contributed to the eleventh century saint's publication in modern Greek.

30. St. Nicodemus's publication of Lorenzo Scupoli's work is the best known of his adaptations of Western Christian writings—at least in the English-speaking world. He did not do so, however, without thorough editing and additions. For an excellent study of his adaptation of Scupoli to Eastern sensibilities and theology, as well as of the later work carried on in the same spirit by the nineteenth century Russian saint, Theophan the Recluse, see the "Introduction" by H. A. Hodges to *Unseen Warfare: the Spiritual Combat and Path to Heaven of Lorenzo Scupoli, edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse,* trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (Crestwood, N.Y., 1978), 13–87.

31. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos,* 265.

32. Alfred Lord Curzon seems to have run across this renewed interest in St. Gregory Palamas and hesychasm in the 1830s. See his conversation with the abbot of Caracallou on the uncreated light: "I thought his account of the extraordinary notions which the monks of those dark ages had formed of the duties of Christianity so curious that it almost compensated for the calamity of losing the only good dinner that I had seen on Mt. Athos," *Visits to the Monasteries of the Levant* (cf. bibliog.), 343.

33. See the concluding works in our Part 5 below.

34. For St. Paissy, see Fr. Sergii Chetverikov's *Starets Paissy Velichkovsky*, trans. Vassily Lickwar and Alexander Lisenko (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1980)—a turn of the century biography and analysis. For a work in a less academic tone, see the life compiled in the nineteenth century by Schemamonk Mitrophanes, *Blessed Paissy Velichkovsky: The Life and Ascetic Labors of our Father, Elder Paissius, Archimandrite of the Holy Moldavian Monasteries of Niamets and Sekoul*, Optina version (trans. and published: Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1976).

35. See the recent book by Mother Cassiana, *Come, Follow Me: Orthodox Monasticism in Moldavia* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1991), for a contemporary account of Rumanian monasticism; for a history of hesychasm in Rumania from the late medieval era to the present, see Bishop Seraphim Joanta, *Romania: Its Hesychast Tradition and Culture* (trans. and published: Wildwood, Calif.: St. Xenia Scete, 1992).

36. See especially the study by John B. Dunlop, *Staretz Amrosy: Model for Dostoyevsky's Staretz Zossima* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1972). One might note as well Nadejda Gorodetzky's *Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk: Inspirer of Dostoyevsky* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1976).

37. On St. Seraphim, for a "modern" (though still very moving) account, see Julia de Beausobre's *Flame in the Snow*, (Glasgow: Collins, 1979), and, more traditional in tone, Valentine Zander's *St. Seraphim*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel, (Crestwood, N.Y., 1975).

38. Several editions exist. For an introduction and selections from the text, see George Fedotov's *Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1975), 280–345.

39. See the section, "In the Light of Your Face," in his article on "The Transfiguration" (ch. 11 below).

40. The conversation is published in Fedotov, *Treasury*, 266–279.

41. The remarks of Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 345, are to the point here; "On two occasions, in the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, a wave of enthusiasm for the uncreated light swept from Athos to Russia, and it filled the hearts of the Russian hesychasts early in the last century. The Russian staretz of that (and of the present) century bears a very close resemblance to the earliest charismatic monks of the Egyptian desert, such as Antony, though without the harshness that was imposed upon the latter by their surroundings... Russian hesychasm reached its peak in the person of St. Seraphim of Sarov... not only did he see the Light of Thabor, but he showed it to others when he was transfigured before them..."

42. For St. Herman's life and works, together with English translations of his surviving letters, see the excellent source book introduced and compiled by Fr. Michael Oleksa, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), esp. 12–15, 39–55, and 72–80.

43. See our Part 5 below.

44. Ibid.

45. Fr. Placide is too kind in referring to such chaos as a "mosaic" when describing the contemporary and identical state of the Orthodox Church in France in our Part 1 below. Even so, it is difficult to escape feeling a certain sense of regret on his part, not to say embarrassment.

46. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 134. For careful accounts of this period and its chief conflict, see the articles by Antoine-Émile Tachiaos. "Controverses entre Grecs et Russes à l'Athos," *Le Millénaire de Mt. Athos*, 2:159–179, and Igor Smolitsch, "Le Mont Athos et la Russie," ibid., 1:289–318.

47. Thus, for some balance on the Russian "invasion" of Athos, i.e., as also the result of Russian piety and genuine spirituality, cf. Serge

Bolshakoff, "Parfeny Ageev, Hegoumenos of Guslitsy," *Le Millénaire*, 2:97–110, for a portrait of real monks and not mere flag-wavers of Imperial Russia. In this context, one might note as well the remarkable figure of the Elder Silouan, recently canonized by the patriarchate of Constantinople and the subject of two books (both noted in our bibliography) by his disciple, Archimandrite Sophrony. St. Silouan was also, arriving as he did before the Russian Revolution, part of the "invasion." It could not then have been all bad.

48. Athelstan Riley, *Athos, or the Mountain of the Monks* (cf. bibliog.), 242–249.

49. Byron, *The Station*, 145–155.

50. Dawkins, *Monks of Athos*, 147.

51. Sydney Loch, *Athos the Holy Mountain* (cf. bibliog.), 102. Loch, loc. cit., even tells of the Greek monks retailing the same slander about the Russian superior who had arranged the takeover of St. Panteleimon's Monastery (the *Rossiko*) as Dawkins (*The Monks of Athos*, 307) had twenty years before, and Riley (*Athos*, 252–253) seventy years before. According to this tale, the man was so evil that the earth would not receive his body, i.e., it would not dissolve, and that in order for his bones to find their way into the monastery ossuary he had to be "boiled." The theme of the wicked dead not being able to return to the earth is an old and familiar one in the region (cf. Dawkins, loc. cit.), applied as well, by Athonite legend, to the monks who permitted a Latin mass to be sung at Great Lavra in the thirteenth century—hence the tale of the "Cave of the Wicked Dead" where their bodies reputedly continue to rest, uneasy, to the present day.

52. John Julius Norwich and Reresby Sitwell, *Mount Athos* (cf. bibliog.), 78–79.

53. Monk Mitrophan, *Holy Russia inside the Soviet Union* (cf. bibliog.), e.g. 100–101. This, by the way, is a particularly interesting book in its portrayal of Greek monks on tour in the USSR of the 1970s as guests of the Russian Church. In fairness we should note that Fr. Mitrophan, a Serb, inclines rather more to the Russian cause than might be considered strictly just. A rather extreme version, on the other hand, of the

Greek view of the Russian presence on Athos runs throughout the book by the Monk Andrew Simonopetrites, *The Holy Mountain: Bulwark of Orthodoxy and of the Greek Nation,* (the title says all—cf. bibliog.). See esp. 112ff.

54. Dawkins, *Monks of Athos,* 147.

55. Phillip Sherrard, *Athos: the Holy Mountain,* 34.

56. Norwich and Sitwell, *Mount Athos,* 146.

57. Ibid., 14.

58. Kallistos Ware, "Wolves and Monks: Life on the Holy Mountain Today" (cf. bibliog.).

59. George Mantzarides, "Mt. Athos and Today's Society" (cf. bibliog.).

60. Ware, "Wolves and Monks," 56–57.

61. Norwich and Sitwell, *Mount Athos,* 146.

62. Fr. Vassileios is also the author of the valuable theology of the monastic life, *Hymn of Entry,* cited in our bibliography below.

63. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos,* 352.

64. For Fr. Joseph see the relevant section in our "Contemporary Paterikon," Part 3 below.

65. Ware, "Wolves and Monks," p. 60.

66. See our ch. 1. An interesting contrast to Fr. Placide's search and discovery is provided by the book of another Roman Catholic and Trappist monk, Fr. Basil Pennington, *O Holy Mountain!* (cf. bibliog.). He came to Simonos Petras as a guest shortly before (1975–76) Fr. Placide and left again impressed—but still Roman Catholic. His journal is undoubtedly a work of immense good will, particularly of value for its portraits of the monastery's abbot and several of the fathers. The reader will note, however, a certain strain of sentimentality pervading his account of his visit, one quite in contrast to Fr. Placide and the others who appear in this volume. Too, the often repeated note, "but we also have this in the Roman Catholic Church," while perhaps understandable in light of the sharp questioning Fr. Basil was undoubtedly exposed to (most of the fathers on Athos being fundamentally ignorant

of Western Christianity and perhaps a little short on tact), could have done with some judicious editing.

67. Ware, "Wolves and Monks," 64.

68. Ibid., 65.

69. All of Solzhenitsyn's non-fiction (and his novels, too) makes this point. See especially the essays he edited in *From Under the Rubble,* (New York: Bantam, 1976), remarkable, *inter alia,* for his (and the other contributors') evocation of Orthodox culture and Church life. Recent analyses of the tremendous changes in what used to be the USSR have, by and large, completely ignored the role of Russia's still living Christian tradition in the break-up of Communist power and effectiveness.

70. For some background on *Zoe,* see Ware's *Orthodox Church,* 150–151.

71. See the sharp remarks by Christos Yannaras, *Timioi me ten Orthodoxia,* (Athens, 1968), esp. 68ff, and *The Freedom of Morality,* trans. Elizabeth Briere, (Crestwood, N.Y., 1984), 119–136, esp. 133ff.

72. Tourism was foreseen as a threat to Athos over a century ago by Athelstan Riley: "When the long-projected railway connects Salonica with Europe, and brings the eager tourists to the threshold of the Holy Mountain, the guardians of the sacred shrines will do well to add to the severity of their laws and increase the jealousy which guards their borders" (*Athos,* 3). They have, but it is still not enough.

73. "Wolves and Monks," 64.

74. Ibid.

75. See bibliography.

76. See bibliography.

77. Dawkins, *Monks of Athos,* 130.

78. Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (Ann Arbor, 1957), p. 14. Ms. Waddell's introduction and translation, since superseded by Sister Benedicta Ward's more complete and accurate rendering of the Sayings of the Fathers in *The Desert Christian* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), is still a work of haunting beauty, if perhaps a little too rooted in the Latin Christian tradition to grasp the full significance of monasticism's

earliest fathers and hence of the tradition which has come down from them to the present day.

79. Constantine Cavarnos, *Anchored in God* (cf. bibliog.), 183.

80. Ibid., 205.

81. Though never completely. See, for example, Fr. Cherubim's account of his encounter with a rigorous ascetic living in the wealthiest—and ostensibly most decadent—of the idiorhythmic monasteries, Vatopedi, in his *Recollections*, 177–180. Note, too, the quality of an Abbot Gabriel of Dionysiou mentioned in our "Paterikon" below.

82. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Practical and Theological Chapters* 3:4, trans. Paul McGuckin, Cistercian Studies, no. 41 (Kalamazoo, 1982), 73. For the Greek text, cf. *Chapitres Théologiques, Gnostiques et Pratiques* (ed. and trans. J. Darrouzès), *SC* no. 51 (Paris, 1957), 81.

THE MONKS OF ATHOS: ORGANIZATION AND DAILY LIFE

Pages 22–38

1. For this and what follows on Athonite organization, cf. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 144–213. For the text of the Charter, see the *Katastatikos Chartes* (Agion Oros: 3d printing, 1979).

2. An example from this century were the Russian "glorifiers of the Name (*Imyaslavtsi*)—*or* "Idolaters of the Name (*Imyabozhniki*)," depending on one's perspective—in 1912/13 who claimed that the divinity of the Lord Jesus abides substantially in His Name, a claim based on biblical precedent and the practice of the Jesus Prayer. The disputes so troubled the Russian community on Athos, and consequently so worried the Russian Synod and imperial government, that a naval flotilla was dispatched to Athos and imperial marines stormed the Athonite coast in July, 1913, in order to haul over eight hundred dissident monks back to Russia and scatter them—and their teaching, as it turned out—throughout the land. The Patriarchate of Constantinople was informed of the action and did not protest, loudly at least, as it had condemned the teaching shortly before. For a study of this sad, though very interesting, affair, see Konstantinos Papoulides's *Hoi Rosoi Onomatolatrai*

(Thessalonica, 1977). Less drastically, and quite recently, the Patriarchate took action at the Holy Community's request to correct scandalous behavior at one of the idiorhythmic monasteries. The latter has, as a result, since become a *koinovion*.

3. For the history of the early monasteries, scetes and hermits from their origins to the mid-sixth century one can do little better than consult Derwas Chitty's *Desert a City*, cited above, p. 262, n. 3. For Scete, see 11–13, 29–35, and 46–64, and for the Palestinian lavras, 82–122.

4. For this unhappy story, see Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 134–141, and Riley, loc. cit., n. 48.

5. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses* (trans. de Catanzaro) (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 26:274–283. For the Greek text, cf. Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (ed. Krivocheine, trans. Paramelle), *SC* 113:68–97. References, pagination, and lines following will be those of the English version.

6. Ibid., 274–5, 11.24–25.

7. Ibid., 275, 11.1–3.

8. Ibid., 276, 11.67–72.

9. Ibid., 277–8, 11.118–121.

10. Ware, "Wolves and Monks," 63.

11. *Discourses*, 278, 11.123–5 and 137–40.

12. Ibid., 281, 11.246–256.

13. Ibid., 282, 11.280–288.

14. Ibid., 11.266–272.

15. Ibid., 282–3, 11.273–299.

16. See our citation of St. Antony's angelic instruction regarding his work in the following section of this introduction.

17. See Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, 220–225. For a description of the habit and texts of the services of tonsure, cf. N. P. Robinson, *Monasticism in the Orthodox Church* (London: Cope and Fenwick; reprint, New York: American Review of Eastern Orthodoxy, 1964).

18. On tonsure as a sacrament, the earliest witness appears to be Dionysius Areopagites, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 6:3; *PG* 3, 533A–C. For the critical text, see *Corpus Dionysiacum II*, ed. G. Heil and A. H. Ritter

(Berlin, 1991), 117. For comment on this development, see K. Holl, *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim Griechishcen Moenchtum* (Leipzig, 1898), 205–210.

19. A personal reminiscence, January 1977 at Simonos Petras. Be it noted that on other, similar occasions hunger proved a hardier combatant and eventually won out—though not without struggle.

20. John Covel, "Journal of John Covel" (cf. bibliog.), 106.

21. Loch, *Athos the Holy Mountain*, 30.

22. Curzon, *Visits*, 296–297.

23. Riley, *Athos*, esp. 120–122.

24. Norwich and Sitwell, *Mount Athos*, e.g. 64ff.

25. See our "Contemporary Paterikon" in Part 3 below, esp. under the heading, "Different Fathers."

26. H. F. D. Kitto, *The Greeks*, rev. printing 1957 (Penguin), 33.

27. Ibid., 207–208.

28. This writer is morally certain that he has partaken of the same soup, continually added to and re-boiled over the generations, that Athelstan Riley complained about in the 1880s (*Athos*, 252–253). It has not improved.

29. Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, 19–20.

30. Cf. Mark 13:33ff; Matt. 24:42ff; and Luke 22:36.

31. E.g. Luke 6:12. Note, too, that Luke also sets the Transfiguration at night during such a vigil, 9:28ff, thus cf. Fr. Aemilianos on "The Transfiguration" in Part 4 below, esp. 207–208. St. Symeon the New Theologian's experiences of the divine light seem likewise to have usually occurred at night. See, for example, his *Discourses* 16 and 22 (de Catanzaro, 200, 11.74–88, and 245–6, 11.70ff respectively).

32. The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the Didache, paragraph 16; text in Early Christian Fathers, ed. Cyril Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 178.

33. From the translation of the Coptic text of *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* VI.36, trans. and notes by Burton Scott Easton (Archon Books, 1962), 55.

34. *St. Arsenios of Cappadocia*, trans. W. J. Lillie (Thessaloniki, 1985), 61 and 66.

35. And the non-Orthodox world as well. This writer, while listening to the car radio on a long, dull drive, caught a Protestant evangelical radio program advocating just this practice.

36. Cf. Kitto, *The Greeks*, 36–37.

37. See esp. St. Symeon the New Theologian's use of the opportunistic merchant as an extended metaphor for the true Christian's duty to fulfill the Pauline (Eph. 5:16) saying of "redeeming the time." 12th Ethical Discourse, ed. J. Darrouzes, *SC* 129 (Paris, 1967), 384–399. The metaphor is of course not unfamiliar to the Gospels (cf. Mt. 13:45). For the pace of life and activity in Medieval Byzantium, see Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, 1982), esp. 29–31.

38. The very theme, in fact, which dominated the first Chapter Meeting (*synaxis*) this writer ever attended at the monastery of Simonos Petras.

39. See, for example, Abba Poemen's struggles with his family in, for example, Poemen 76 and 180, *The Desert Christian*, 177–178 and 195.

40. See, for example, St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Discourse* 7 (de Catanzaro), 130–142.

41. Personal reminiscence. The story was repeated time and again; families mourning their son, lost to monasticism, as one dead... in its way, the perception is, after all, quite true.

42. See again Kazhdan and Constable, *People and Power*, 32ff.

WHY MONKS?

Pages 38–65

1. John 14:21 and 23.
2. John 17:3.
3. Mark 1:14–15 and Matt. 4:17.
4. Mark 4:30–32; Matt. 13:31–32; and Luke 13:18–19.
5. Matt. 13:33 and Luke 13:20–21.
6. Matt. 19:45–46.

7. Ibid., v.44.

8. Luke 17:21.

9. Mark 10:29.

10. Mark 8:34–35, Matt. 16:24–25, and Luke 9:23–24.

11. For the Transfiguration in Patristic literature, cf. Fr. Georges Habra, cited in n. 14 above, p. 277.

12. For example, Mark 8:34–35, then 9:2–8 followed immediately by 9:9–12.

13. 2 Cor. 4:8–11.

14. Rom. 12:5.

15. Rom. 7:4.

16. Col. 1:19.

17. Heb. 12:22.

18. Rev. 21:23.

19. Heb. 12:22

20. Col. 3:3.

21. Acts 7:55.

22. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Romans* 7, trans. J. B. Lightfoot, ed. J. R. Hamer. *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan, 1891; reprint, Grand Rapids, 1980), 78.

23. Ibid., 2; p. 76.

24. Ibid., 6; p. 77.

25. Letter to the Smyrneans on the Martyrdom of Polycarp, 14. Lightfoot, 114.

26. Eusebius of Caesarea, *History of the Church* 6:2. Quoted from the translation by G. A. Williamson (Penguin, 1965), 240.

27. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium*, PG 18, cols. 27–220. English translation by Herbert Musurillo, *Ancient Christian Writers* no. 27 (Westminster, Md., 1958).

28. *Life of Antony*, 3. PG 26, 844A.

29. Eusebius, *History of the Church* X, 9, 7 (Penguin, 413–414).

30. See, for example, the recent work by Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Princeton, N.J., 1990), for an eloquent account of the theology of the icon as a triumph of Christian culture.

31. The case for the Christian empire, though not without an eye toward the problems "Christendom" raised for the Gospel, has been argued from the Orthodox perspective most recently—and impressively—by Fr. John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1989.

32. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, bk. 6, 7.14–15 (*NPNF* ser. 1, 1:122–123).

33. Ibid.

34. The works of Peter Brown are as delightful and perceptive an exposition along these lines as may be found anywhere. See esp. the essays collected in his fascinating *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1982, in particular 103–195. In a less strictly academic vein see his *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971), 96–112.

35. See Archbishop Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, N.Y., 1986), esp. 95–112.

36. *Life of Antony*, 14; *PG* 26, 864C–5B.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 16–43 and 46; 865C–908A, and 909B–12B.

39. Ibid., 50; 917A.

40. Ibid., 60, 65, and 82; 929A–32A, 933C–6A, and 957A–60B.

41. Ibid., 88; 965BC.

42. Ibid., 66, 71–80; 936C–7B, and 944A–56A.

43. Ibid., 15; 865C.

44. Ibid., 87; 965A.

45. For this fundamental theme in the spiritual literature of the Christian East, see the excellent—and moving—study by Fr. Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Mourning in the Christian East*, trans. Anselm Hutstader, OSB, Cistercian Studies, no. 53 (Kalamazoo, 1982).

46. Chitty, *Desert a City*, xv.

47. Waddell, *Desert Fathers*, 8.

48. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. 37, vol. 2 (New York: Modern Library), 363.

49. See, for example, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Martin Luther: Three Treatises*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 198–203.

50. Quoted by Waddell, *Desert Fathers*, 4.

51. A. J. Festugière, OP, *Les Moines d'Orient* 1 (Paris: Editions de Cerf, 1961), 24–25.

52. Ibid., 39.

53. Ibid., 14–15. There is, of course, a subtle (or not so subtle) polemic going on here—or, perhaps better, a certain disposition against the tradition of the Greek East in favor of the Latin West. All three citations above are sandwiched by a continued pleading for the superiority of the intellectual strain in the Benedictine and later Latin Orders. Festugière's remarks are thus not quite so surprising as they might seem coming from a Roman Catholic religious. His striking insensitivity to the subtleties of the early and subsequent Greek monastic literature is fully paralleled—indeed, with the exception of a reverence for the Desert Fathers, exceeded—by the Comte de Montalembert's *The Monks of the West* (London, 1861, 287–378, esp. 373–378) a century earlier. The latter's animus is reserved in particular for Byzantine monasticism, whose representatives he dismisses as "slaves of Islamism and accomplices of schism" (377). While Festugière belongs thus to a certain tradition, his is certainly not the only voice among Roman Catholic scholars. See, for example, Louis Bouyer's *History of Christian Spirituality* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), esp. 1:303–394.

54. Personal reminiscence, from a conversation on the bus returning from Ouranoupolis to Thessalonica.

55. John 6:60.

56. Barsanuphius of Gaza, Letter 682, Quoted by Hausherr, *Penthos*, 4.

57. Heb. 11:1.

58. Epistle to Diognetus, in Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, 217.

59. *Life of Antony*, 59, 86, 89; *PG* 26, 928–9A, 964AB, and 968AB.

60. Jer. 20:7.

61. *Life of Antony*, 69; *PG* 26, 941AB.

62. Cf. Theodoret of Cyrrhus's *History of the Monks of Syria* (trans. R. M. Price), Cistercian Studies, no. 88, p. 172. For the Greek text, *SC*, no. 257, 210–212.

63. See the translation of St. Daniel's life by Elizabeth Dawes and Norman W. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Oxford, 1948), 7–71, esp. 49–50.

64. *PG* 90, 109C–129D. For the English, see *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist, 1985), 15–28.

65. St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson, (Crestwood, N.Y.: 1980).

66. *St. Theodore the Studite on the Holy Icons*, trans. Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood, N.Y.: 1981; Greek, *PG* 99, 327–436). Mrs. Roth's "Introduction" speaks of St. Theodore's exiles on p. 8.

67. For the "heresy of pusillanimity," see Discourse 29 (SC 113:164–193, and de Catanzaro, 308–317). Symeon's insistence on the experience of God as both available and necessary to the true Christian runs through all his works.

68. See esp. the article by J. Gouillard, "Quatre Procès de Mystique à Byzance (Ver 960–1143)," *Révue des Études Byzantines* 36 (1978), particularly 35–9 and 43–5.

69. For St. Gregory's life, cf. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, esp. 13–101, and on hesychasm in particular, 134–156.

70. See Oleksa, *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*, and our n. 42 above.

71. Jer. 20:9 and 14.

72. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns* 1, 11.42–45, SC no. 156, ed. Johannes Koder, trans. J. Paramelle (Paris, 1969), 160.

73. Ibid., 58, 11.25–31 (SC 196, p. 280).

74. *Discourse* 2 (SC 96, p. 176, 11.421–426, and de Catanzaro, p. 58, 11.422–427.

75. *Discourse* 17 (SC 104, pp. 556–8, 11.90–48; and de Catanzaro, 205, 11.30–48).

76. St. Symeon's works now in English include, *The Discourses* (cited above), *Hymns of Divine Love*, trans. George A. Maloney (Denville, N.J.), *The Practical and Theological Chapters and the Three Theological Discourses* (cited above, n. 82, p. 207), and, in preparation for publication by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, his *Ethical Discourses*.

77. Krivocheine, work cited above in n. 35, p. 274.

78. *Hymn* 31, SC 174, p. 428, 11.15–17.

79. Isa. 6:1ff and Ezek. 1:1ff.

80. George A. Maloney, *The Mystic of Fire and Light: St. Symeon the New Theologian* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1975), 11.

81. Krivocheine, "The Writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 20 (1954), 324.

82. Just where one dates that inception before the rise of monasticism in the fourth century is unclear. For our part, we would see the elders of the desert as in the same tradition as the prophets mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles* (e.g. 21:9–11), in the *Didache,* 11 and 85 (cf. Lightfoot, 117–8), and subsequently in *The Shepherd of Hermas* (cf. Lightfoot, 165ff), and—albeit in a different key—in the "Christian Gnostic" of Clement of Alexandria and the *didaskalos* of Origen. For the former, cf. esp. *Alexandrian Christianity,* ed. Henry Chadwick (Westminster Press, 1954), 93–165 (for the Greek, *PG* 9, 401–557), and, for the latter, see for example St. Gregory the Wonderworker's "Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen" in *ANF* 6:18–39, esp. 28–31. See also the article by Henri Crouzel, "Origene, précurseur du monachisme," *Théologie de la vie monastique* (Paris, 1961), 15–38.

83. Benedicta Ward, *Desert Christian,* xx.

84. P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church* (Oxford, 1978), 55.

85. Ibid., p. 28. Rousseau is quoting St. Pachomius, *Vita* 1:48.

86. P. Rousseau, "The Spiritual Authority of the Monk Bishop: Eastern Elements in some Western Hagiography of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *Journal of Theological Studies* 55 (1971), 384.

87. One thinks of the charismatic calling of the "holy fool." For a study of this phenomenon in Christian tradition, cf. John Saward, *Perfect Fools* (Oxford, 1980), and esp. 12–30 for the Orthodox East. In recent centuries in the Orthodox Church, the eighteenth century saint, Xenia of St. Petersburg, is perhaps the most well known and remarkable example of the "fool for Christ."

88. Bishop Kallistos Ware, foreword to Irénée Hausherr's *Spiritual Direction in the early Christian East*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel Cistercian Studies, no. 116 (Kalamazoo, 1990), vii.

89. From James Dunn's article, "The Pentecostals," in the *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of the Christian Church*, ed. Tim Dowley (Carmel, N.Y., 1977), 618–620.

90. Ibid., p. 618.

91. Ibid., p. 622.

92. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* V, SC 129, 181–187, p. 92. See also his third discourse in the same series, SC 122, 390–440.

93. Antony, 1 (Benedicta Ward, *Desert Christian*, 4; *PG* 65, 76AB).

94. Luke 21:19.

95. Antony, 16 (Ward, 4; *PG* 65. 80C.

96. Antony, 4 (p. 2; 77A).

97. Antony, 6 (p. 2; 77A)

98. Antony, 7 (p. 2; 77AB).

99. Antony, 26 (p. 7; 84C).

100. Matt. 18:3.

101. Rousseau, Ascetics, Authority, 28.

102. Rousseau "Spiritual Authority," 386.

103. Pambo, 2 (Ward, 196; *PG* 95. 368D).

104. Antony, 30 (p. 17; 85B).

105. Joseph of Panephysis, 7 (p. 103; 229CD).

106. Exod. 13:21 and 14:19–20. For studies on the theme of God's glory, cf. n. 14, pp. 263–4 above.

107. Exod. 34:29–35.

108. 1 Kings 8:10–11.

109. Isa. 6:1f.

110. Ezek. 10–11.

111. Dan. 12:3.

112. Arsenius, 27 (Ward, 13; *PG* 65. 96BC).

113. Pambo, 1 and 12 (pp. 196–7; 368BC and 372A).

114. Silvanus, 3 and 12 (pp. 222–4; 409A and 412C).

115. Sisoes, 14 (p. 215; 396BC).

116. From the "Prayer of the Trisagion," Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

117. Cleopas is mentioned by Mother Cassiana, op. cit. Fr. Philotheos has inspired a good deal of literature in Greece, as has Fr. Joseph, but none of it to our knowledge has as yet been made available in English.

118. Anselm Hufstarder. "Translator's Preface" to *Penthos,* ix.

119. Vigen Guroian, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: 1989), 164.

120. Ibid., 164–165.

121. Ibid., 177.

122. See, for example, Fr. Alexander's *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1979), esp. the opening essay, "The Underlying Question," 7–24.

123. Fr. John Meyendorff has also often directed his writing to the difficulties inherent in the position of the Orthodox Church in a world not of its own making. Perhaps most helpful for introducing the reader to the thinking of this important Orthodox theologian would be *Living Tradition* (Crestwood, N.Y.), 1978, and *Catholicity and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1983).

124. See, for example, Martin Marty's *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in North America* (New York, 1970), for the Protestant Evangelical roots of American nationalism, and, for the replacement of evangelical fervor by a vague sort of religious sanction, see the book ed. by Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974.)

PART ONE: ON THE WAY TO THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

Chapter 1: Stages of a Pilgrimage

Pages 69–102

(These notes comprise part of the translated text of the article by Father Placide. Our additions, for purposes of clarification, will be indicated by the use of brackets.)

1. Beurons, Maredsous, and Solemnes are Benedictine monasteries (i.e., following the Rule of St. Benedict) located respectively in Germany, Belgium and France. During the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century they contributed greatly to the liturgical and patristic renewal of the Roman Church. Dom Marmion (1858–1932), abbot of Meredsous, published very sound works on spirituality, basing himself primarily on the doctrine of St. Paul, and thus exercised a very considerable influence.

2. Johannes Joergensen: Danish author who published an excellent life of St. Francis of Assisi in 1909.

3. Fioretti ("Little flowers of St. Francis") are a collection composed in the hermitages of Umbria [the province of St. Francis's birth and where he spent much of his life—ED.]. They tell the story of Francis's life and that of his first companions with great freshness.

4. The Cistercians are a monastic order comprising the monasteries dependent on the Abbey of Citeaux (in Latin: *Cistercium*). It was founded in Burgundy [southeastern France—ED.] at the end of the eleventh century by a small group of Benedictine monks who wanted to live a life of greater poverty and simplicity than that of the great monasteries of their era. The order was adorned in the twelfth century in particular by Bernard of Clairvaux, who exercised an enormous influence on his era as a preacher, author of spiritual works, and counselor of popes and kings. In the following centuries the order underwent an evolution which took it far from the austerity of its origins. It was partially reformed in the seventeenth century, in particular under the influence of d'Armand-Jean de Ranee, abbot of the monastery of

Trappe in Normandy [La Grande Trappe]. This reform gave birth, in the nineteenth century, to the Trappist Order, or Cistercians of the Stria Observance.

5. John of the Cross (1545–1591): a Spanish religious [i.e., member of a religious order, but not—at least according to the definitions of Roman Catholic canon law—a monk.— ED.] who was associated with Theresa of Avila in his work of reforming the monasteries which followed the Rule of Carmel [Carmelites]. He is one of the greatest mystical writers of the Catholic Church. His teaching can be summed up in the following maxim: "Do not seek out the presence of creatures if you want your soul to keep the features of God's Face in their clarity and purity, but make an absence in your spirit and remove it from every created thing: you will then walk in the lightning flash of God's light, for God is not like what is created."

6. The French school of spirituality: name given to a Catholic spiritual movement which began in France under the direction of Cardinal Pierre de Berulle (1575–1659). The latter propounded in numerous works a doctrine of the deification of the Christian which was inspired by the Fathers of the Church, especially by SS Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo. He had many disciples and successors up to the nineteenth century. Louis Lallemant and Jean-Joseph Surin, French Jesuits, were among the most remarkable spiritual writers of the seventeenth century. Their whole doctrine tends to show that, by grace of a total renunciation of his will, the Christian can arrive, by God's grace, at a condition where "man is so moved and aware of the Holy Spirit that he is scarcely any longer aware of his own inclinations, but only those of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the principle of his motions, in accordance with that which St. Paul said: 'Those are the children of God who are guided by His Spirit.' "

7. Henri de Lubac: French Jesuit who, during the whole period following the Second World War, contributed greatly to making the works and thought of the Fathers familiar to Roman Catholics.

8. Jean Daniélou (1905–1974): French Jesuit, named a Cardinal in 1969, who exercised his apostolate [work in the world on behalf of

Christ and the Church] in intellectual and university circles, and who published numerous writings on the Fathers of the Church.

9. Odo Casel (1886–1948): German Benedictine, was the principal theologian of the liturgical renewal in the Catholic Church. Nourished on the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, he strove to demonstrate in numerous works that the liturgical feasts of the Church are not simply recollections of past events, but make the basic facts of God's economy of salvation objectively present for the Church, such that the believers may participate in them [certainly he was an important source as well for the thought and writings of such modern Orthodox teachers as, for example, the late Fr. Alexander Schmemann—ED.].

10. *Dieu Vivant* (Living God): journal of religious culture which appeared in Paris from 1945 to 1953, with the collaboration of Fr. Daniélou. It opened up an extensive exchange, at a very high intellectual level, between the different Christian confessions, the great religions, and contemporary philosophical thought. Authors such as Vladimir Lossky and Myrrha Lot-Borodine brought to it the witness of Orthodoxy. *La Maison-Dieu* (The House of God): journal of liturgy which, between the Second World War and Vatican U, was the principal organ of liturgical renewal within the Catholic Church for French-speaking countries.

11. *Sources chrétiennes*: a series of publications, with French translation, of the texts of the Church Fathers. Founded in 1942 by Fr.s de Lubac and Daniélou, this collection, at present directed by Fr. Mondesert, today [1984] includes more than three hundred volumes. Its creation had as its purpose to "allow the return to the sources of Christian thought" by publishing the writings of the Fathers, and to "create a bridge between East and West by making available those texts which comprise their common patrimony for the first ten centuries." The series, marked by very sound scholarship, was particularly well received in university circles.

12. *Action catholique*: a group of organizations composed of Catholic laity exercising an apostolate, whether in their local parishes or their work places, under the responsibility of the hierarchy. These

different movements, beginning to appear from 1926 (creation of "Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne" [Young Christian Workers]), underwent considerable development following World War II. They contributed much to changing the understanding that the Catholic Church had of its relations to the world and of the role of the laity. The Church of the Counter-Reformation (see n. 14), highly clericalized from its summit in the Pope on down, had seen itself as transcendent to the world and charged with communicating to it a Truth and Life received from God which the world did not in itself possess. In this Church, the function of the laity was especially to accept the direction of the hierarchy and to make use of the means of sanctification which the latter had at its disposal. With the development of Action Catholique, the Roman Church began to think that the world, like the Church, is animated by the Holy Spirit, and that the modern world's great aspirations for progress, social justice, and brotherhood among men are the work of this Holy Spirit Who acts hiddenly within. The proper role of the Church would then be to reveal to the world the real name of the mysterious Breath which in fact animates it, and to help and guide the world to the accomplishment of its hopes, which accomplishment will be made definitive with the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time. This new conception had as a consequence a profound alteration of the status of the laity in the Church: by reason of their very familial, professional, and political involvements, the laity came to appear as particularly well-placed to exercise a positive role in the mission of the Church to the world.

13. Worker priests: a certain number of Catholic priests had been prisoners of war between 1940 and 1945. By partaking thus of their fellows' common lot, they had discovered a new approach to their apostolate which seemed promising to them for the evangelization of the de-christianized world of the workers. On returning to France they wanted somehow to prolong this experience by joining the exercise of a profession to their priesthood—the job often being that of a worker in a factory. But this attempt quickly took on a particular meaning in view of the developments in the relations between Church and world which had begun to appear at the time (see n. 12 above). In this context,

a crisis in the priesthood began to result: "The layman, Christian in the full sense of the word, allows the priest only a role which is secondary and, in effect, unobtrusive. Whence the paradoxical desire of the priest to become a layman—or, to put it less abruptly, his desire to share completely in the human condition in all its forms and not appear as an anachronism in contemporary society" (P. Guilmont, *Fin d'une église clericale?* (End of a Clerical Church?) Paris, 1969; 327). This particular perspective would eventually lead, in the wake of Vatican II, to a rather large number of priests purely and simply abandoning the priesthood, and it would cause as well a significant decline in the numbers entering the seminaries. In the years preceding the Council, however, some priests—often among the most zealous for this apostolate—saw in their involvement in professional activities and, eventually, in their responsibilities in the unions one of the possible ways of adapting the exercise of the priesthood to the new conception of the Church vis-à-vis the world which advanced Catholic circles wanted to see become that of the Roman Church. Beginning in the years after World War II and with the support of Cardinal Surhard, at that time Archbishop of Paris, the experiment of the worker priests posed a question to the traditional Roman ecclesiology which was too radical to be approved by the Vatican of that era. The experiment was terminated by the voice of authority between 1953 and 1959. This in turn provoked a fairly serious crisis in the Church of France. The experiment, though, of the worker priests had significantly contributed to prepare the climate of Catholic opinion for the changes at work in the Roman Church after Vatican II.

14. Counter-Reformation: the vast movement of internal reform which took place in the Roman Catholic Church following the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which was convoked to remedy the deficiencies and abuses which had contributed to the birth and development of the Protestant Reformation. This period saw the accentuation of certain negative aspects of the medieval Roman Church: an over-centralized understanding of the papacy and an authoritarian one regarding the hierarchy; an overly rationalized and often decadent scholastic theology; the Inquisition in matters of doctrine, which occasionally resulted

in a reign of terror. But, at the same time, a number of great spiritual personalities, such as Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross, gave rise to a most remarkable renewal of religious fervor and prayer life. The latter animated reforming bishops such as Charles Borromeo in Lombardy and Francis of Sales in Savoy, who exercised an enormous influence and had many imitators. These were the kind of men who prayed, fasted, and kept vigil like the ancient Fathers, who devoted themselves in all ways to the poor, the sick, and the disinherited, yet who were also energetic men of action and organizers. They gave the Roman Church all that was best in her, which she preserved from the end of the sixteenth century to the middle of the twentieth.

15. M.-J. Le Guillou, *L'ésprit de I'Orthodoxie grecque et russe* (The Spirit of Greek and Russian Orthodoxy) (Paris, 1961), 47.

16. J. Gelineau, *Demain la Liturgie* (The Liturgy Tomorrow) (Paris, 1976), 10.

17. Yves Congar, *Notes sur le schisme oriental*, Chevetogne 1954, 43. [Two works of Fr. Congar in English give ample demonstration of the position Fr. Placide is discussing here: *After Nine Hundred Years* (Fordham, N.Y., 1959), and *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (Mystic, Conn, 1985), esp. 47–104, where Fr. Congar, in the looser atmosphere of the post-Vatican years, stretches ecumenical possibilities about as far as one conceivably could without abandoning the Roman Church altogether. His feel and sympathy for the Orthodox Church is palpable and, if we cannot always agree with him, we must surely at least salute his generosity.— ED.].

18. A. Vauchez, *La spiritualité du Moyen Age occidental* (Paris, 1975), 68.

19. P. Batiffol, *Cathedra Petri* (Paris, 1938), 75f.

20. W. De Vries, Orient et Occident: Les structures ecclésiales vues dans I'histoire des sept premiers conciles oecuméniques (Paris, 1974), 215–216.

21. S. Boulgakov, *L'Orthodoxie* (Lausanne, 1980), 101–102.

22. See especially the excellent study of Yves Congar on Economy: "Orthodox theologians, with some exceptions... base themselves

overwhelmingly on the affirmation that true sacraments exist only in the One Church... This position seems to approach a common understanding and expresses a traditional basis of Orthodox thought" (Y. Congar, "Propos en vue d'une théologie de l' "Économic" dans la tradition latine," *Irénikon*, 1972, 180 and 183). The anonymous author of the editorial in the same edition of *Irénikon* judiciously sketches the limitations of the Augustinian theology which prevailed in the West. With reference to the sacraments of the heterodox, he notes: "Since the thirteenth century a mistaken perspective has, for us, detached the sacraments from ecclesiology. This would seem to us to be the logical conclusion of the slow evolution of those positions taken by the West since its struggle with Donatism. Progressively, the theology of the Holy Spirit was made to pay for it until the effective elimination of His role in the relation between the sacraments and the Church. Vatican II tried to remedy this. Very timidly, sometimes clumsily, with more good will than an understanding of the whole" (op. cit., 153–154). In any case, one can say that since the third century there has never been any unanimity regarding the recognition of the sacraments of the heterodox and, outside the Latin tradition, it is indeed the opposite which has prevailed. See also P. L'Huillier, "Les divers modes de reception dans l'Orthodoxie et les Catholiques romains," in *Le Méssager Orthodoxe*, no. 88 (1979/1), and the same in "Économie ecclesiastique et la réiteration des sacraments" in *Irénikon* 1977, 228–247 and 338–362. [Still, it should be noted that, particularly with a view to what follows in Fr. Placide's autobiography, there is a debate in the modern Orthodox Church. To say, as Fr. Placide does below, that the "Cyprianic" view of the sacraments has generally prevailed in Orthodox thought, though certainly true and in particular true of the Greek-speaking Church (Mt. Athos above all!), is still not to address the question whether or not there is something to be said for the equally ancient view of Stephen of Rome, Cyprian's third century contemporary and adversary on this question, and the later writings of Augustine of Hippo. For the view that Augustine's understanding is indeed to be preferred to Cyprian's as eliminating certain of the very real ambiguities in the latter's approach and, incidentally, of the

contemporary (and often chaotic) application of "economy," see the article by the late Fr. Georges Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church," in *Sourozh* no. 26 (1986), 13–24 (also printed in vol. 13 of *The Collected Works of Father Georges Florovsky*, 1989, 36–45). Note in particular Fr. Georges's observation, "Contemporary Orthodox theology must express and explain the traditional canonical practices of the Church in relation to heretics and schismatics on the basis of those general premises which have been established by Augustine" (*Sourozh*, 23). It is arguable that, at least in this one instance, the influence of Latin theology on the Russian Church may eventually prove to be of some benefit for the Church as a whole. It is true in any case that with this question, that is, the reception or non-reception of heterodox sacraments, we have arrived at one of the "neuralgic points" of present day Orthodoxy in response to, in particular, the challenge posed by the Ecumenical Movement.—ED.]

23. P. L'Huillier, "Les divers modes" (cited in previous note), p. 22, n. 25.

24. This information was circulated *via* a confidential note addressed to French-speaking Catholic monasteries by the "Monastic Secretariat." It is concerned with the reasons why "Fr. Placide and his companions" asked to be baptized against the will of their abbot (!): "By behaving in this way, they doubtlessly hoped to cultivate the approval of the most conservative elements of Athonite monasticism, in whom they sensed a suspicious caution, even hostility." *Bulletin au Secretariat monastique* (October, 1977).

25. E. Behr-Sigel, in *Contacts*, no. 45 (1964/1), 49.

26. Archimandrite Basil, Abbot of Stavronikita, in *Contacts* no. 89 (1975/1), 101.

PART TWO: THE GARDEN OF THE THEOTOKOS

Preface

Pages 109–111

1. Mark 4:3–20 and 56–31.

2. John 16:21.

3. Rev. 21:2.

4. See our "Introduction" above, note 14.

Chapter 3: The Garden of the Mother of God

Pages page 112–113

1. Ninth century. His feast is the 12th of June.

2. St. Gregory Palamas, *Life of St. Peter the Athonite*, 11 PG 150, 1005.

3. "Standing in the temple of your glory, we believe ourselves to be standing in heaven. Mother of God, gate of heaven, open to us the door of your compassion" (*Apolytikion* at the end of Matins during Great Lent).

4. The *Tricheirousa*, the image with "three hands," is that before which the miraculous healing of the hand of St. John Damascene is supposed to have occurred (see the translation [in French] of his life in *Le Méssager Orthodoxe*, no. 92, 1983, 91). The icon was brought from Jerusalem to Athos by St. Sava of Serbia, founder of Hilandar, in the early thirteenth century.

5. See St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I, 10; *SC* 122, 252–265.

PART FOUR: THE SPIRITUAL FATHER

Preface

Pages 171–178

1. See our "Introduction" above, n. 36.

2. For an analysis of Dostoyevsky's work which is fully aware of the writer's background in the Orthodox Church, see Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoyevsky; His Life and Work,* trans. Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, 1967).

3. Evagrius of Pontus, *On Prayer,* 3. *The Philokalia: The Complete Text,* trans. Palmer, Sherrard, Ware (London, 1979), 1:57. In the Greek text, published by Astir in Athens, the work is listed under the name of St. Nilus of Sinai, 1:177.

4. Evagrius, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer,* trans. John Eudes Bamberger, Cistercian Studies no. 4 (Kalamazoo, 1981), 14.

Chapter 9: Martyrdom, Foundation of Orthodox Monasticism

Pages 179–193

1. Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Praise of St. Cyprian, PG* 35, 1181B.

2. John of Sinai, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent,* trans. Lazarus Moore, revised and reprinted (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1978), Step 4, 68. For the Greek text, see *Klimax Ioannou tou Sinaitou* 4:60 (Athens: Astir Pub., 1970), 42.

3. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On Virginity,* 10; *PG* 28, 261D–4A.

4. Macarius of Egypt, *Spiritual Homilies* XV:11–12. For critical text, see Doerries, Klostermann, and Kroeger, *Die 50 Geistliche Homilien des Makarios* (Berlin, 1964), p. 133, 11.159–160. For English translation, see *Intoxicated with God,* trans. George Maloney, (Denville, N.J., 1978), 97.

5. Isaac of Syria, *Discourse* 95:336 in *Tou Hosiou Patros Hemon Isaak, Ta Evrethenta Asketika,* Athens. For English see *The Ascetical Homilies*

of St. Isaac the Syrian, ed. and trans. (Boston, Mass.: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 37:173.

6. History of the Monks of Egypt (Jerusalem, 1914), 196.

7. John of Sinai, *Klimax* 4:93 (p. 45), Greek; *The Ladder* 4:94 (p. 46), English.

8. Ibid, 4:37 (p. 39); English text; 4:44 (p. 38).

9. Theodore of Studion, *Four Chapters* 3; PG 99, 1681B.

10. Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, *On Those Who Choose to Live in Retreat* 32, *Philokalia* (Greek text) 4:232.

11. Abba Longinus, 5, Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Christian*, 123; PG 65, 257B.

12. St. Symeon the New Theologian [no textual reference is given in the Greek pamphlet, but see *Ethical Discourses* XL, SC 129:332, 11.40–48, and 342–350, 11.187–295].

13. Gregory of Nazianzus, PG 35, 593B.

14. John of Sinai, *Klimax* XXIX,3 (p. 159); English text: XXIX.5 (p.221).

15. Isaac of Syria, *Asketika*, 123; *Ascetical Homilies* 20, 101.

16. Troparion for St. Basil.

17. History of the Monks of East, ed. cit., 190.

Chapter 10: Mount Athos, Sacred Vessel of the Prayer of Jesus

Pages 194–206

1. One could translate the technical expression, νοερὰ προσευχή more exactly as "mental prayer," but the latter calls to mind a different form of spirituality, one developed and practiced in the West. The expression here deals rather with the Jesus Prayer in all its stages, that is, from being spoken aloud to the pure prayer of the intellect (νοῦς) in union with the heart.

2. St. Gregory of Sinai, PG 150, 1277–1280.

3. Kallistos Kataphygiotes, *On Divine Union and the Contemplative Life*, 86: PG 147, 913.

4. St. Ephrem the Syrian, cited in Paul Evergetinos, *Synagogue* 13:11, 9.

5. Evagrius of Pontus, cited in the *Sacra Parallela* of St. John Damascene, *PG* 95, 217.

6. St. Sabbas of Vatopedi lived on Athos, Cyprus, and in Palestine during the fourteenth century (d. 1349). St. Philotheus of Constantinople knew him well and was the editor of his remarkable biography, a veritable defense of hesychast doctrine. For reasons unknown, the memory of St. Sabbas is not commemorated in our time. See the *Life of St. Sabbas,* ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta Ierosolymitikis Stacylogias,* Tome V (St. Petersburg, 1898); reprint, Brussels, 1965: here paragraph 27, p. 241.

7. Evagrius (under the name of St. Nilus), *Chapters on Prayer* 15; *PG* 79, 1179D.

8. Ibid., 153; 1200.

9. Ibid., 62; 1180.

10. An allusion to St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 182 (*SC* 1:226).

11. Life of St. Sabbas 25, p. 236.

12. Ibid., 27, p. 240, and 36, p. 257.

13. Ibid., 34, p. 256.

14. Ibid., 36, pp. 258–260.

15. Fr. Arsenios of Simonos Petras (d. 1981) had for many years led an indifferent spiritual life. One day he found himself caught by a sudden storm while fording a stream and, in fear of his life, begged the Mother of God to save him and promised to amend his life. Instantly he was miraculously transported to the stream's bank. But he fell again into his old negligence. Some time later, while resting after a good meal and taking a siesta, a very ugly demon came and perched himself on the monk's prominent stomach, filling the whole room with an appalling stink. At that point Fr. Arsenios remembered his promise and began on the spot to lead a life of asceticism and repentance worthy of the great ascetics of the past. He lived by himself in a little hut while barely feeding himself with a little dry bread and a few lentils. He did not come to the monastery except for Sundays and feast days. Humble, silent, but

with a face of astonishing brightness, his person commanded respect from everyone.

16. Papa Tikhon, the Russian of Kapsala (d. 1968)—see our "Contemporary Paterikon" above.

17. Ibid.

18. The monasteries of Philotheou, Dionysiou, Constamoniou, Caracallou and Xeropotamou are at present occupied by communities under the direction of disciples, direct or indirect, of Fr. Joseph. His influence, however, is also felt in numerous other communities outside the Mountain.

Chapter 11: The Experience of the Transfiguration

Pages 207–230

1. *Menaion,* August 5, first stichera of Vespers.

2. Exclamation of the priest before the singing of the Magnificat at Matins.

3. *Life of St. Euthymius of Iveron* in *The Great Synaxarion,* May 5.

4. *Life of St. Maximus the Kavsokalyvite* 8, ed. F. Halkin, Amdecta Bollandiana 54 (1963), 10–79.

5. Monk Joseph, "The Elder Joseph the Hesychast" (in Greek), *Perivoli tis Panagias* (Thessalonica, 1983), 21; see also our "Contemporary Paterikon" above.

6. Two monasteries are dedicated to the Transfiguration, Koutloumousiou and Pantocrator.

7. Philotheus of Constantinople, *In Praise of Saint Gregory Palamas,* PG 191, 567B and 574C.

8. Ninth Ode of the Canon for Pentecost.

9. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 28, PG 91, 1195D.

10. John of Damascus, *Homily on the Transfiguration* 12, PG 96, 564C. It is the common opinion of the Greek Fathers which was taken and developed by St. Gregory—cf. his own *Homily on the Transfiguration,* PG 151, 433AB.

11. *Definition* of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon).

12. St. Gregory the Theologian, *Homily 39* 13, *PG* 36, 39–1; and *Letter 103*, *PG* 37, 188. [For the English translation of the latter, see *NPNF* 2nd ser., 7:356.]

13. "You therefore have come covering the splendor of Your divinity with the shadow of Your body. For how could mortal perishable nature be united with the nature which is inaccessible and imperishable, if the shadow of the body had not interposed itself as a mediator of the light for us who dwell in darkness?" St. Gregory of Nyssa, Homily 4 on the *Song of Songs*, *PG* 44, 838. [For an English translation of this work, cf. *Gregory of Nyssa: The Song of Songs*, trans. Casimir McCambley (Brookline, Mass., 1987)].

14. St. Gregory Palamas, *First Homily on the Transfiguration*, *PG* 151, 439C, and with a text from St. Basil in *Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* 11,3,21 (ed. P. Christou), 1962, 1:557.

15. Second stichera of the Great Vespers for Transfiguration, *The Festal Menaion*, trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (Faber and Faber, 1969), 470. See also the *Kontakion* of the Feast.

16. Gregory Palamas, *Defense of the Hesychasts* 2:3,20; p. 556.

17. Ibid. St.John of Damascus also says: "and the body shone like the sun; it is to the body, in effect, that the glory of the Transfiguration belongs." *Homily on the Transfiguration*, *PG* 96, 565C.

18. John of Damascus, Ibid. 4; *PG* 96, 552D. A little further down he also says: [Christ's] clothes shine with the radiance which the divine splendor communicates to them" (565D).

19. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 28, *PG* 91, 1128–D.

20. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection*, ed. Jaeger (1963), p. 213, *PG* 46, 285.

21. Isa. 26:9, These verses are nowadays sung with "alleluia" during Great Lent. On other days we sing the paschal verses: "God is the Lord and has appeared to us... " (Ps. 118:27), but in the past the office of Matins with the "Alleluia" was the daily usage.

22. *Photagogikon* of the Second Tone, which is sung in place of the *Exapostilarion* during Great Lent, but which—again—used to be the daily usage.

23. Office of Preparation for Holy Communion, Prayer 7 (composed by St. Symeon the New Theologian).

24. *Troparion* of the Nativity.

25. John of Damascus, the Canon of Pascha.

26. Macarius of Egypt, *Great Letter*, 30 and 29, ed. Jaeger (1963), 286 and 284.

27. "Not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33).

28. Philotheus of Constantinople, *Life of St. Gregory Palamas*, PG 151, 166C.

29. John of Damascus, *Homily on the Transfiguration* 18; PG 96, 572C.

30. Isaac of Syria, *Letter* 3, ed. Spetsieris (1895), 364.

31. "For it is this that the true knowledge of Him Whom he seeks consists, and in the fact of not seeing the true vision resides, because the object of the quest surpasses all knowledge, separated from everything by His incomprehensibility as by darkness," St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, 153.

32. *Homily IX* on *The Song of Songs*, cf. McCambley's translation (see n. 13) 203.

33. Argument over the correct interpretation of Dionysius runs throughout St. Gregory's defense of the hesychasts. The view upheld by Barlaam has been revived in recent times by Jean Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu*, Brussels 1959, and in English, his article, "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?" *Journal of Religious Studies* (1963), 286–300. A modern antidote might be sought in the recent book by Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton, Conn., 1989), which sees both Dionysius and Gregory as within the same current of tradition.

34. Gregory Palamas, *Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* 11,3,35 (Christou, 568–9).

35. John of Sinai, *Klimax* 27:19; p. 160; English, *The Ladder*, p. 214.

36. Gregory Palamas, loc. cit.

37. Isaac of Syria, *Discourse* 32 (Spetsieris, 140). Cf. also Gregory Palamas, 1,3,21 (Christou, 196).

38. Gregory Palamas, 11,3,52 (p. 584). On the reciprocal ecstacy of God, cf. 1,3,47 (p. 458).

39. First stichera of Little Vespers, August 8, *The Festal Menaion*, 468.

40. "En-hypostatized," i.e., "en-personed" light. The light of God is never an impersonal "stuff," and its communication to us is always a communication of the Persons of the Trinity. The light is the presence of the Spirit in Whom we meet the Son through Whom we have access to the Father. For the personal quality of the light, and the use of term "enhypostatized," cf. Gregory Palamas, *Defense* HI, 1,9 (p. 623): Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassios* 61 (*PG* 90, 644D), and Macarius, who speaks of the "sure and permanent illumination of the hypostatic light within the soul," *On the Liberty of the Spirit*, 22 (*PG* 34, 956D–7A).

41. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns* 25, 11.42–8 and 54–61. The translation cited here is that of George Maloney, 136.

42. Macarius of Egypt, *Spiritual Homilies* I, 2. See Maloney's translation, 37.

43. Gregory Palamas, *Defense* 1,9,38 (p. 449).

44. *Sayings of the Fathers*, Sisoes 14 (*PG* 65, 396). English, Ward, 214–215.

45. Fedotov, *Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, 274ff.

46. *Life of St. Athanasius the Athonite*, 21C, ed. Noret (Brussels, 1984), 147.

47. Life of St. Simon the Myrrh-Flowing, Founder of Simonos Petras, Great Synaxarion, Dec. 28.

48. Kallistos Xanthopoulos, *Life of St. Gregory of Sinai* (ed. Pomjalovsky, St. Petersburg, 1894, 11–12). Cf. also the vision of his disciple, Clement, ibid., 56–59.

49. Philotheus, In Praise of St. Gregory Palamas, PG 151, 575.

50. Philotheus, *Life of St. Sabbas* 34 (Papadopoulos-Kerameus, p. 256), cf. also 24 (p. 237), 35 (p. 257), 36 (p. 150), 4 (p. 268–71), and 58 (p. 304).

51. Life of St. Acacius the New in the Great Synaxarion, April 12.

52. Cf. Archimandrite Sophrony, *The Monk of Mt. Athos* (bibliog.).

53. Archimandrite Cherubim, *Life of St. Callinicus the Hesychast* (in Greek), Pub. Paraklitos, Athens 1969, 52–3.

54. Monk Joseph, "The Elder Joseph," 68, 70, 72–3, and 96–7.

PART FIVE: SAINT HERMAN OF ALASKA

Chapter 12: Reception in Greece of the Relics

Pages 235–246

1. The actual date of the saint's repose was some 40 days earlier, as explained in the sermon that follows.

Chapter 13–14: Sermons in Honor of Saint Herman

Pages 247–276

1. I.e., in Kodiak.
2. Literally, tradition.

An Annotated Bibliography of Mount Athos

The reader seeking a complete bibliography of Athos is advised to consult the one compiled by Dom Irénée Doens, "Bibliographie de la Sainte Montagne de l'Athos," in *Le Millénaire de Mount Athos 963–1963, Études et Mélanges*, vol. 11 (Éditions de Chevetogne, 1964), 337–495. The over 2600 entries comprise as full a survey of works published in both Eastern and Western European languages over the past two hundred years as can be found anywhere. In the following, we have limited ourselves to the more notable works in English which have appeared in the past century or so. Even then this list is far from complete, but we offer it as possibly helpful for any who may be interested in further investigating the history and character of the Holy Mountain. We have also limited ourselves to the books and (a few) articles devoted strictly to Athos and not to the larger themes of Orthodox monasticism and spirituality. References to works on the latter subjects are, however, frequent in the notes to our "Introduction" above as well as in those which Fr. Macarius has supplied for the talks by abbot Aemilianos.

BOOKS ABOUT ATHOS

1. Amand de Mendieta, Emmanuel. *Mount Athos: The Garden of the Panagia.* Translated from French by Michael R. Bruce. *Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten*, Band 41. Akademie Verlag, Berlin, in Arbeitsgemeinschaft mit Adolph M. Habkirt, Amsterdam (1972). This is far and away the most complete study of Athos's history, organization, and life available in English, invaluable for serious students. It is generally sympathetic to the aims and spirit of Athonite life, though not uncritically. Amand de Mendieta's background is scholarship in the Greek patristic

tradition, particularly St. Basil the Great and the latter's contributions to early monasticism.

2. Byron, Robert. *The Station, Athos: Treasures and Men.* 1928. Reprint. John Lehmann Ltd., 1949. The account of a journey to Athos taken by the author in the company of David Talbot-Rice, later one of the first art historians to become a specialist in and write favorably of Byzantine art. Byron was a young man when writing this, and the book is flavored in consequence by a young man's temper and enthusiasms. They tend toward the romantic. He is, nonetheless, an admirer of what he sees and, in particular, an advocate of the Byzantine tradition—sometimes more so than strict justice might allow.

3. Cavarnos, Constantine. *Anchored in God: Life, Art, and Thought on the Holy Mountain of Athos.* Athens: Astir Publishing Co., 1959. The account of the author's two visits to Athos in 1954 and 1959. Capsule descriptions of the different monasteries, five to ten pages each, and concluding with the scetes and hermitages. Particularly valuable for its conversations with different monks, including Joseph the Hesychast. Cavarnos allows them to speak, often very movingly, and has the background to clarify the context of their remarks.

4. Cavarnos, Constantine. *The Holy Mountain.* Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1973. A useful handbook to the theological, spiritual, and cultural contribution of Athos, this features short biographies of the leading Athonite scholars, missionaries, and saints (pp. 15–74), together with a shorter section on the Mountain's music, musicians, and hymnography (77–90), the account of another visit (93–127), a calendar of athonite saints (146–153), glossary and bibliography. The omission of St. Paissy from the first section—or anywhere in the book—is the one glaring feature.

5. Choukas, Michael. *Black Angels of Athos.* London, 1935. A Greek-American trained in sociology looks at Athos. Mr. Choukas sees the Mountain shortly coming to an end while regretting the loss of so handy a receptacle for society's malcontents and incompetents. Interesting, if only to see how a resolutely secular mind looks at the monastic republic.

6. Christou, P. C. *Athos, the Holy Mountain: History, Life, Treasures.* Translated from Greek by W. B. Lillie. Thessalonica: Kyromanos, 1990. Professor Christou is a noted patristics scholar with a particular interest in St. Gregory Palamas (he has been editing the critical Greek text of the saint for some years). This is a thorough inventory of Athos's history and monuments by one who is familiar with both. It is somewhat marred by a certain flavor of Greek nationalism, particularly in its treatment of the Russian presence.

7. Covel, John. "The Journal of John Covel." With notes by F. W. Hasluck. In *The Annual of the British School at Athens,* 17 (1910/1911). London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 103–131. Hard to find without a specialist library, this is still the very interesting and earliest account of an Englishman's visit to Athos, in the spring of 1677. Covell notes the scrambling for funds necessitated by the conditions of Turkish rule and, of some theological interest, the easy-to-hand presence of books by and about St. Gregory Palamas and the hesychast controversy (111)—still apparently a lively topic.

8. Curzon (Zouche), Robert. *Visits to the Monasteries of the Levant.* London: 1849. Reprint. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1955. Perhaps a quarter of this book is devoted to Curzon's visit to Athos in the 1830s on a manuscript—gathering expedition (he does seem, by his own account at least, to have been fair about it). The descriptions of the monks and monasteries come, as it were, from out the corner of an eye on the lookout first and foremost for interesting codices. Still, when he looks the glance is sharp and shrewd. His conversation with the abbot of Caracallou is of note for its indication of the renewed interest in St. Gregory Palamas and hesychasm.

9. Dawkins, R. B. *The Monks of Athos.* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1938. This is an historical study, not a travelogue. Very useful in its examination of Athos's "folk history," the character of its monks, its life and piety. Dawkins is almost invariably sympathetic to his subject, though always from the perspective of an outside observer with an eye to historical criticism. His observations can still be consulted with profit.

10. Hasluck, F. W. *Athos and its Monasteries.* London: E. P. Patterson and Co., 1924. A shorter work in the same spirit as the later works by Dawkins and Amand de Mendieta. Divided into two parts, a history of Athos (3–111), and descriptions of each of the twenty monasteries (115–196).

11. Lake, Kirsopp. *Early Days of Monasticism on Mt. Athos.* Oxford, 1909. One of the earliest critical studies of Athonite history in English.

12. Loch, Sydney. *Athos: the Holy Mountain.* London: Lutterworth Press, 1957. Loch (d. 1954) was a philanthropist, observer of folk culture, and friend of both Athos and the Greek people. He lived many years at Ouranoupolis, gateway to the Mountain, and his book is rich with accounts of remarkable, yet genuinely human men. He captures the rhythms of their speech, often hauntingly. One cannot help liking, even loving, everyone concerned. Gentle humor and much wisdom.

13. Norwich, John Julius, and Reresby Sitwell. *Mount Athos.* New York: Harper and Row, 1966. Witty, entertaining and often observant—if a little flippant in tone—Sitwell and Norwich mingle historical reminiscence with an account of their two visits (one cannot, in their case, say pilgrimages) to the different monasteries. Many splendid photographs, most of them in color. See our "Introduction" above for quotations.

14. Pennington, Basil, D.C.S.O. *O Holy Mountain! Journal of a Retreat on Mount Athos.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978. For comment, see *supra* p. 268, n. 66 to our Introduction above.

15. Riley, Athelstan. *Athos or the Mountain of the Monks.* London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1887. An early travelogue. The writer is an Anglican academic, generally well-disposed toward his subject (and rather unfairly criticized for a "condescending attitude" by Byron—op. cit., 178). An early ecumenist, Riley describes the interesting phenomenon of an Anglican liturgy celebrated at the guest quarters of the Great Lavra with the latter's monks looking on interestedly, and is valuable in particular for his account of Russian-Greek tensions at the height of the Russian "invasion" (239ff).

16. Sherrard, Phillip. *Athos: the Holy Mountain.* Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press; London: Alexandria Press Ltd., 1982. Perhaps the most

valuable and easily accessible single introduction to Athos available in English. Exquisite photographs, clear and informative text. Sherrard provides a brief though substantial account of all facets of Athonite and, generally, Orthodox monastic life: history (12–53), forms and origins (55–79), the art of the icon and relics (78–109), monastery organization and life (111–147), and the way of prayer (148–171). The book has the added advantage of being written from within the Orthodox tradition as the author is a noted Orthodox scholar and a theologian in his own right.

ARTICLES ABOUT ATHOS

1. Bonsall, Dom Leo Bonsall, O.S.B. "The Benedictine Monastery of St. Mary on Mt. Athos." *Eastern Churches Review* 2:3, 262–269 (1969). On the monastery of the Amalfitans, the Latin presence on Athos into the fourteenth century.

2. Bolshakoff, Serge. "Parfeny Ageev, Hegoumenos of Guslitsy (1507–1566), and some other Russian Athonite monks of his time." In *Le Millénaire de Mt. Athos,* 2:97–110. Chevetogne, 1964. On the early nineteenth century Russian presence on Athos and its leading representatives.

3. Mantzarides, George. "Mount Athos and Today's Society." *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XXVI (158a), 225–235. Dr. Mantzarides is professor of Patristics at the University of Thessalonica. His is therefore the opinion of one who is close to the Mountain both physically and in terms of his studies. The article is a report on the increase in monks from 1971 to 1980.

4. McNulty, Patricia, and Bernard Hamilton, "Greek Influences on Western Monasticism." *Le Millénaire de Mt. Athos* 1:181–216 (1963). Claims an influence of Greek spirituality on the Latin monastic reforms of eleventh—twelfth centuries—only indirectly related to Mt. Athos.

5. Meyendorff, John. "Mt. Athos in the Fourteenth Century: Spiritual and Intellectual Legacy." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42:157–165 (1988). An assessment of the importance of Athos's witness to the Orthodox Tradition during the hesychast controversy and the latter's impact on

the subsequent history of the Church. Meyendorff argues for the view we have set out in section 3 of our "Introduction" below.

6. Sherrard, Phillip. "The Paths of Athos." *Eastern Churches Review* 9:100–107 (1977). A warning note on the contemporary revival. Sherrard is troubled by the present monks' increasing reliance on twentieth century transport and technology. The article is substantially repeated in *Athos, the Holy Mountain*, 41–53.

7. Taft, Robert, S.J. "Mt. Athos: A Late Chapter in the History of the Byzantine Rite." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42:179–194 (1955). The Athonite contribution to the Orthodox liturgical cycle and ethos: "Their chief merit was to canonize and popularize the Byzantine monastic hours and eucharist in its (more or less) present form" (p. 194).

8. Kallistos (Ware), Bishop. "Wolves and Monks: Life on the Holy Mountain Today." *Sobornost* 5:2, 56–68 (1983). Extensively quoted in our "Introduction" above, section I.

9. Kallistos (Ware), Bishop. "Athos after ten years: the good news and the bad." *Sobornost* 15:1, 27–37 (1993). The bishop looks at the Mountain ten years after his original article. He finds the renewal still under way, but points out that the problems suggested by Sherrard in "The Paths of Athos" have grown more pronounced. Also very troubling are the efforts—successful so far—of the Greek government directed against monks of non-Greek origin (Serbian, Rumanian, Bulgarian) coming to renew *their* communities on Athos.

BOOKS BY ATHONITE MONKS

Early Works

1. Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The Triads*. Translated by Nicholas Gendle. Introduction by John Meyendorff. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1983. Selections from the most important of St. Gregory's works concerning the hesychast controversy. A very useful introduction by Fr. John Meyendorff together with illuminating notes.

2. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, Saint. *The Philokalia*. Translated by Ware, Sherrard, and Palmer). London: Faber and Faber, 1981 (vol. 1, paperback), 1989 (vols. 2 and 3). The complete anthology

compiled by SS Nicodemus and Macarius of Corinth (three more are in preparation) whose enormous influence we have dwelt upon above.

3. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, Saint. A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel. Translated by Peter A.

4. Chamberas. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1989. A summary of patristic teaching on the human being and the spiritual life. Dr. George Bebis's "Introduction" (pp. 5–65) provides useful information on the saint's life and influence, as well as both an analysis of the state of the Church under Turkish rule and Nicodemus's own teaching.

Contemporary Works

1. Simonopetrites, Andrew. *Holy Mountain: Bulwark of Orthodoxy and the Greek Nation*. Translated by John-Eletros Boumis. Thessalonica/Athens, 1969. A well-intentioned book and of interest as an example of a completely uncritical approach and a rather narrowly Greek nationalist perspective. The English is too often quaint, an uncomfortably literal rendering of the elaborate prose favored by Greek ecclesiastics.

2. Cherubim, Archimandrite. *Recollections of Mt. Athos*. Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Press, 1987. The author's reminiscences of his youth and early manhood in an Athonite *kellion* at Kavsokalyvia, one of the hermit settlements. Moving in its evocation of the life there and sharp recall of the different personalities of the area, this is a valuable addition to the growing literature in English by the Athonites themselves. A good introduction by the Greek bishop, Maximus, of Pittsburgh provides a summary of monastic and Athonite history.

3. Cherubim, Archimandrite. *Contemporary Ascetics of Mount Athos*, vol. 1. Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1992. "Introduction" by Monk Gerasim Eliel. This is an invaluable collection of biographical portraits, featuring some of the most prominent Athonite spiritual fathers from the mid-nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth centuries. At least two of the sainted elders whose lives are described here are mentioned by Abbot Aemilianos above, Callinicus the Hesychast (cf. *Ascetics*, pp. 171–219) and Daniel of Katounakia

(*Ascetics*, 223–320). Others not mentioned, such as Athanasius of Gregoriou (*Ascetics*, 93–167), should figure in any list of Athos's saints. As in his earlier work, Fr. Cherubim writes simply and movingly. The "Introduction" by Monk Gerasim supplies useful information particularly about the eighteenth century background of SS. Nicodemus and Macarius of Corinth in the "Kollyvades" movement which was the forerunner of the wave of renewed hesychasm in the latter part of the century.

4. Cherubim, Archimandrite. *Contemporary Ascetics of Mount Athos*, vol. 2. Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1992. The parade of late nineteenth and twentieth century Athonite saints continues in this companion volume. Five holy men are described in detail, including the Elder Philaret of Constamonitou (pp. 589–642) mentioned in our "Patericon" (*supra*, 137–138). In addition, other remarkable figures are more briefly described, such as the Elder Hilarion the Georgian (377–390 and 697–703), the Elder Hadji George (477–486), the holy inhabitants of Saint Basil's Scete (660–665), and the clairvoyant Elders Theodosius and Ignatius of Karoulia (704–708). An index for both volumes (709–721) provides a guide to both the Athonite saints themselves and to their patristic sources.

5. Hierotheos (Vlachos), Archimandrite. *A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain*. Translated and published: Livadia, Greece: Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, 1991. A fictionalized account in the form of an extended conversation with one of the hermits of Athos, the latter being a probable combination of Joseph the Hesychast and one of his still living disciples. Very popular in Greece and, although colored somewhat by a touch of romanticism, still a fine introduction to the practice of the Jesus Prayer, together with the basic emphases and teachings of Orthodox spirituality.

6. Mitrophanes, monk of Hilandar, *Holy Russia in the Soviet Union*. Translated by Dr. Nicola Kostich. Minneapolis, Minn.: Light and Life, 1989. Account of a pilgrimage taken by the author in the company of other Athonite monks to the Soviet Union in the mid-1970s. For comment, see our "Introduction," p. 285, n. 53.

7. Sophrony, Archimandrite. *Wisdom from Mt. Athos: the Writings of the Staretz Silouan.* Translated by Rosemary Edmonds. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974. Though presently the retired abbot of the monastery he founded in Essex, England, Fr. Sophrony lived many years on Athos. Here he provides the reader with the moving and remarkably profound meditations of his own elder, the recently canonized Silouan of St. Panteleimon Monastery (the Rossiko) on Athos. We say "remarkably profound" because St. Silouan was a simple Russian peasant whose education derived from the liturgy of the Church and the "university" of the monastic way, the true "philosophy."

8. Sophrony, Archimandrite. The Monk of Mt. Athos: Staretz Silouan (1866–1938). Translated by Rosemary Edmonds. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975. Fr. Sophrony's biography of his elder and portrait of a contemporary saint in the ancient, Athonite tradition. An invaluable book.

9. Archimandrite Vassileios, *Hymn of Entry.* Translated by Elisabeth Briere. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984. Quite the most sophisticated of the theological works listed in this bibliography, excluding the earlier Fathers. Fr. Vassileios presents the monastic life as one fully rooted in the mystery and worship of the Church. The integration of theology, worship, and spirituality is profound and constitutes a witness of lasting value. Most highly recommended.

10. Monastery of Simonos Petras. *Simonopetra, Mt. Athos.* Athens: Hellenic Industrial Development Bank, 1991. A splendidly produced volume (though not inexpensive, and available only via the monastery) with impressive, scholarly articles on everything from the monastery's history (and that of Mt. Athos more generally) to its life and worship, its physical environment and "sacred space," and detailed analyses of its holdings—its manuscripts, icons, vestments, church plate, and so forth. The book's intent is to provide as complete a portrait as possible of one Athonite monastery. The text is accompanied by handsome photographs of the monastery's landscapes, buildings, the living members of its brotherhood, and those of its possessions which have artistic and historical value. Contributors include Professors N. Oikonomides and

A.-E. Tachiaos (history), I. Foundoulis (liturgy), and Abbot Aemilianos (on the monastic life), among many others.

The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain

Contemporary Voices from Mount Athos

From as early as the ninth century, Mount Athos -- a monastic republic situated on a peninsula in northern Greece extending some 35 miles into the Aegean Sea -- has been a monastic center and a spiritual beacon of the Orthodox world. As the present collection of essays, sermons, narratives, and apophthegmata shows, the significance of the work of the monks who come to Athos to devote themselves to God continues undiminished, as does the vitality of their contribution to the spiritual life of Orthodoxy worldwide. In these pages we see the simplicity and truth of the Gospel reflected in anecdotes of contemporary Fathers of the Holy Mountain; we read of the connection between the light of Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor and Orthodox monastic spirituality; we learn how St. Herman of Alaska, America's first Orthodox saint, was a kind of gift to America from Athos. Several writings by Archimandrite Aemilianos (Vapheides), Abbot of Simonos Petras Monastery on Mount Athos, set forth the critical importance of the spiritual father and the Jesus prayer in an Orthodox monastery, and the link between monasticism and martyrdom. A leading French Catholic scholar recounts in detail his path to Orthodoxy over a span of many years. Also included is the Tomos of Mount Athos in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts -- an important Orthodox doctrinal document, written in the fourth century by St. Gregory Palamas and signed by the elders of the Holy Mountain. These writings, together with the others in this volume, have all been written by Athonite monks. All but one of them appears in English for the first time, translated by His Eminence, Archbishop Alexander (Golitzin), who contributes, in his illuminating Introduction, an examination of Athonite history, organization, and daily life.

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The Most Reverend Alexander is the Archbishop of Dallas, the South and the Bulgarian Diocese. A patristics specialist, Abp. Alexander holds a D.Phil. from Pembroke College, Oxford, and an M.Div. from St. Vladimir's in New York.

Saint Tikhon's Monastery P·R·E·S·S

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